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IONE BY E. LYNN LINTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

ROBERT H. H. H.

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I O N E.

BY

E. LYNN LINTON,

AUTHOR OF

“PATRICIA KEMBALL,” “THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS,”
“THE GIRL OF THE PERIOD,” ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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E. LYNN LINTON

Author of
"The One of the Name," etc.
"The Name of the Name," etc.

CONTEMPORARY

IN THE

VOL. II.

1881

STATIONERS

1881

THE

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I O N E.

CHAPTER I.

AT LAST!

SOME days after this they were all once more in the grounds of the Villa Clarissa—sitting under the carruba-tree which stood in the centre of the rose-garden. For three days the scirocco had been blowing, and the nerves and health of every living thing in the island had been severely tried. Frays had been rife among the populace; quarrels had been the rule of life in all the homes; children had cried with more unappeasable insistence than usual; women had shrieked with shriller voices and heaped insults on each other's heads with wilder gesticulation; men had yelled with more fury in their passion, more pungency in their words, more ready recourse to the knife and freer threats of the revolver; while the more refined and self-controlled of the educated classes had moped or snapped or sulked according to their natures, and made themselves and all about them as uncomfortable as it was in their power to do.

St. Claire, always sensitive to weather, had been depressed and ailing. He had not left the hotel, but

had sat in his own room stripping the healthy skin from his healing wounds; dreaming of Monica and accusing Providence by his grief; fretting about Ione and plaguing himself with impracticable desires and unprofitable schemes for her benefit; making all his molehills into mountains full of sharp rocks and deep abysses; and going through a whole world of unnecessary anguish as his participation in the general disturbance of men and things, because the wind blew from the south-east and brought with it some of the poison and torpor of the desert.

To-day, however, the whole atmosphere was changed. The wind blew fresh and clear from off the sea, and the irritability and nervous exhaustion of the last seventy-two hours had passed like a bad dream.

It was now the middle of March, and the garden was full of fragrant scents and lovely growths. The walls of the house were still crimson with bougainvillea and perfumed by climbing roses, while heliotrope, lavender, rosemary, and geraniums, all in large bushes rather than plants, mingled with mignonette and orange-blossoms in one rich chord of fragrance which carried a kind of intoxication to the senses. Birds were singing in the trees; iridescent flies were darting through the air; gorgeous butterflies and softer moths were fluttering like rootless flowers blown hither and thither by the fresh wind; the sky was a pure unclouded blue where was never a stain—not veiled and softened, not full of dreamy suggestion and tender languor as it sometimes is, but stimulating, productive, energizing—a sky, a sun, an air which seemed to mock all sorrow, to dry all tears, and to spur the blood to the gorgeous madness of hope, the exulting

insanity of joy. Surely there was not a melancholy line, not a saddened scene in the whole drama of human history! Surely all men were strong, all women lovely, all hearts loving and beloved on such a day as this!—a day which had for its whole essence happiness, and for all its circumstances beauty.

How good it was to live here in this fair and fruitful Palermo—this pearl in the heart of the Golden Shell! How delicious to drink in delight with every breath that brought the very entrancement of existence—the very ecstasy of being! How all the grief of the past was forgotten, and only the consciousness of the radiant present remained! It was as if pain had been transformed to pleasure—as if the elements of sorrow had been taken to form the substance of joy.

And how beautiful Ione looked, sitting in that curule-shaped garden-chair—sitting in that motionless and graceful way of hers, which was at once so proud and so seductive! St. Claire on a lower seat, seemed almost at her feet, and Clarissa took credit to herself in that she was too good-natured to say so, and thus spoil the picture and the suggestion.

They had been sitting here for some time, with sundry of the servants coming about them on trivial pretexts of business, but in reality like children eager to have a share in the small family festa going on beneath the carruba-tree. Of them all, Vincenzo was the most incessant and the most persistent. Now he came to bring the ladies flowers—whereof Mrs. Stewart had the largest number; but surely Ione's were the most choice, and Clarissa's the most ordinary?—now he came to speak to the padrone on some perfectly

unimportant matter, which he would have dilated on till he had lengthened it out into the parley of an hour, had not the Captain stopped him with military abruptness and as much frankness, telling him he was a "ciuce" for his pains and "che diavolo!"—what did he want? Repulsed or not, however, he always came back to the group beneath the carruba-tree, and always stood where he could best see Ione sitting like a fair and youthful Agrippina, her clasped hands resting lightly on her knees, her eyes now cast down and now looking straight before her into space, or sometimes stealing brief glances at Armine St. Claire, as is the way with women who feel more than they have confessed, and who love, unbidden of the beloved.

The conversation turned on the mafia, which Captain Stewart held as only the tacit convention of certain men to despise the intervention of the law, and to be their own avengers. According to him, it was nothing but the Corsican vendetta under Sicilian conditions; as thus: if A. were injured or murdered, and B. were known to be the person who had done the crime, A., or his family, would not deliver B. up to justice to be dealt with according to law, but they would bide their time, take their measures, and execute judgment with their own hands. This, and this only, was the mafia, he said; and people who talked about a secret society, or secret subsidies to brigands to be held harmless of aggression, talked a world of nonsense and did not know what they said.

Had he said all this to a person who knew Palermo, it would have been confirmation of the whis-

pered suspicion that Captain Stewart was a mafioso himself, and that he owed his immunity from trouble to his punctual payments of black-mail. Men get into the habit of suspicion in this beloved Italy, where the impress of the old hand of tyranny still lies on the flesh of the nation, and where, in consequence, words are held as valuable masks for thoughts; but as Armine did not understand more than the merest surface of things, he accepted what he heard in its simplicity, and thought it all very straightforward and intelligible.

From the mafia and the mafiosi, the talk drifted on to the condition of the poor—the wages they received; the food they ate; the dwellings in which they lived; and then on to the strange mixture of servility and familiarity in their manner, and the cleverness which comes by gift of nature to almost all. And specially the Stewarts dwelt on the facility with which a man can turn his hand to anything; so that your gardener can be your cook, and your cook can be your valet, while your valet makes up your old clothes into new suits for himself as well as if he were a professional tailor, and the tailor buds your roses and cooks your macaroni with no more trouble than he has when he cuts out your coat.

“This Vincenzo now,” said Captain Stewart, “he is simply invaluable. He can do everything, and he will do anything he is asked. The fellow has no pride or nonsense, and he is my right hand in all ways. I do not know how I should get on without him, ugly dog as he is; though I take care not to let him know that he is worth more than a pinch of snuff to me. If I did, he would become insolent and

try to be my master. You have to keep your foot on their necks if you don't want their knuckles in your own throat."

"You mean they are slaves," said St. Claire quietly.

"Substantially, yes," said Captain Stewart. "Centuries of misrule have moulded them into what they are, and the effect of these centuries is not to be overcome in one generation."

"You are sure he does not understand English?" asked St. Claire, looking at Vincenzo, who was standing there, cap in hand as usual, surveying the group in the amiable manner of his race.

In spite of the broad smile which showed that unbroken row of small shark-like teeth, there was something in the glittering eyes and observant look of the man which always disturbed St. Claire. He had distrusted him from the first, and he distrusted him even more as time went on, and his first impressions deepened rather than wore away.

"What an idea! Vincenzo understand English? No!" said Mrs. Stewart, a little peevishly. "What a horrible suggestion, Dr. St. Claire! You had better call him a mafiose at once!"

The Captain laughed.

"No, he is neither a mafiose nor an Admirable Crichton," he said. "He is only a poor devil who ought to be a gentleman, for he is the son of a count, the grandson of a duke, the nephew of a prince, and I don't know what beside; but he is penniless, as so many of them are; so he is my servant instead. Still, he is of good family, so far as that goes, and he answers my purpose admirably."

"And being a gentleman by birth, of course he is more high-minded than the rest," said St. Claire.

"Well, I don't know about that," drawled the Captain. "I cannot say that he is quite honest on his own account—none of these fellows are—but he would not let any one else rob me of a lira."

"I should not quite relish his own dishonesty, however careful he might be of my interests with others," said St. Claire, taking his stand on the British ideal.

"Oh, you are too precise for us!" said the Captain, with a fine shade of irony. "In Sicily, I can tell you, you must take what you can get, and be thankful it is no worse."

"It might be better by all accounts," said St. Claire.

"We cannot have perfection anywhere," returned the Captain, on the defensive for the sake of opposition.

"We might try for improvement," said St. Claire.

"At least we have no strikes, no wife-kicking, no drunkenness," the Captain answered with an aggressive drawl, making Armine responsible for all the sins in Great Britain.

"But more general crime and less truthfulness," said St. Claire.

The Captain shrugged his shoulders.

"We put up with it," he said with affected indifference. "And as we get used to it we understand it better than in the beginning, and are not taken in by it. Their flatteries and promises of mountains and seas, and pleasant little tarradiddles out of pure complaisance and kindness—it is only a way

they have. All nations have their ways. The main thing is to understand them so as not to be caught by them."

"I do not think I could ever get accustomed to want of truth and honesty," returned St. Claire, tenacious to his point.

"Then do not live in Italy," said the Captain curtly.

"No, I never shall," said St. Claire simply.

"I am sure I would rather have this civil, obliging, good-natured, and perfectly respectful Vincenzo about us than any of your insolent English creatures," said Mrs. Stewart, with an odd little outbreak.

To fall foul of anything purely Britannic at this moment was like laying a few stripes on St. Claire's shoulders, and it soothed her to find a whipping-boy of any kind.

"Would you?" he asked, sweet and amiably obtuse. "I would not. I would rather have more truth and less cleverness—more independence and less sweetness of manner in those who served me."

In saying which he was perfectly innocent of all suspicion that he might be condemning himself.

But his host looked at him sharply, and said in his slow deliberate way:—

"I should not have thought you would have found fault with sweetness of manner, St. Claire, or would have preferred blunt honesty to gracious—what shall I say?"

"I should say flattery," said Mrs. Stewart.

Clarissa laughed. Ione's straight dark eye-brows met above her eyes in a heavy frown.

"No, I do not flatter," said St. Claire, with un-

ruffled amiability. "To show when you like people and to say openly that you admire them—that is not flattery."

"But you cannot admire every one so very much as you say you do," said Mrs. Stewart as she had said once before. "You must flatter some among them!"

"I do not know which they are," he answered, smiling. "I am sure it is not any one here!" he added pleasantly.

At this moment Vincenzo, who had been gone for some few minutes, suddenly reappeared from the back of everything—coming among them with that quiet stealthy tread which never made itself heard till he was fairly in the midst of them, and then only because he purposely scraped his feet on the gravel. His eyes were very bright, and his breath came thick as if he had been running, but his wide mouth smiled as usual, and his manners were also as usual—good-humoured, familiar, obliging, and subservient. He told the padrone that he was wanted in the office; and Captain Stewart, on rising, looked back to St. Claire, and, for all his displeasure with the disguised prince who had disappointed him, said hospitably: "Don't go yet, St. Claire. I shall be back directly."

"That man of yours may be a good fellow, as you say, but I confess I do not like his looks," said St. Claire, as the master and his man moved away.

"We do not choose our servants for their beauty," said Mrs. Stewart. "If they do our work well we do not care whether they are plain or handsome."

"But I dislike the man's face not so much because he is so exceedingly plain—and really I think he is

the ugliest fellow I have ever seen—as because it is of such a low type. He does not look straight at you when he speaks. He seems to do so, but he does not. And when he does his eyes are like a tiger's. They are so fierce and with such a strange yellow light about the rim of the iris."

"He is as good as any of them," said Mrs. Stewart crossly. "And it would be a pity to prejudice my husband against him. He is so useful that we should be quite lost if we had to part with him."

"I should be sorry to do that," returned St. Claire gently.

"But finding incessant fault with him and calling him ugly and of a bad type is not exactly the way to make any one satisfied," said Mrs. Stewart, with her disagreeable smile. "You seem to have taken quite a prejudice against the poor fellow from the very beginning," she added fretfully.

"I hope not!" he answered.

"Perhaps saying hard things of him is your way of showing favour," she returned.

St. Claire looked perplexed. He could not understand this decided change of front in one whom he had been accustomed to consider his maternal Palermitan friend. He had become so used to be a favourite among the Stewarts that it was almost like hearing a foreign language to catch that frosty accent, to hear that fretful voice; and he looked at his hostess with his beautiful eyes as if asking her with pain what she would have him to understand.

Ione turned paler than usual, and for a moment seemed about to speak; but she did not. She only shot out one glance to Mrs. Stewart which seemed to

warrant all that has ever been said of the fabled basilisk; then lowered her lids and drew her lips into a thin line, her breath coming a little fast as Vincenzo's had done. Clarissa for her part smiled in an inane and amiable way, as if she were not conscious of the sting and was only amused by the paradoxical humour of her mother's words.

And soon after this Mrs. Stewart, still nursing her vague wrath against the young fellow who in the beginning of things had been so nice, got up from her seat saying to her daughter: "Clarissa, come with me, my dear; I have to speak to Amarella." Turning to St. Claire she repeated her husband's words: "Do not go yet, Dr. St. Claire. We shall be back directly. I merely have to give an order to the maid. Ione will entertain you till we return," she added as her own coda, not in the original theme.

With this she put her hand on her daughter's arm and the two went slowly through the roses and the flower-beds towards the house.

And when they were fairly out of sight Ione drew a deep breath and looked at St. Claire with her rare and wonderful smile, her eyes dilated, soft, dark, seeming to say in audible words: "How good it is for us to be here together and alone!"

How beautiful she was, and how perfectly she fitted in with her surroundings! St. Claire looked at her with admiration, with æsthetic enthusiasm, with artistic satisfaction, even with professional appreciation and critical content. So young, so full of life, so healthy, so vigorous, and withal so refined! It was the nervous grace of an Arabian thoroughbred; the sensitive charm of a young gazelle; the superb power of a

sleek-skinned couching panther; it was the freshness of a flower just opened to the morning before culmination has been reached and after immaturity has been passed; it was the effulgence of the gem ere use has dimmed its lustre; it was maidenhood in its most resplendent moment, when, no longer childish, it is not yet completed womanhood. And of this resplendent moment Ione was the most enchanting and the most perfect product.

Set against the leaves as both background and frame, with the sunlight falling in one narrow line across her head and shoulder, she sat there silent as was her wont, motionless as was her wont, and yet not inert. Hers was the silence of intensity, the motionlessness of expectation. She was like one of the old-time nymphs waiting for her god to come to her. It was not for her to seek, not even for her to meet. She had only to wait; to answer when he should call, to greet him when he should arrive, to receive him with glad acceptance of his love, and to give all her own for everlasting in return for his divine grace of a moment.

After the thin acridity of Mrs. Stewart and the mindless cheerfulness of Clarissa it was restful and refreshing to be with this beautiful Galatea who assumed to be a statue and who was so true a woman. All her potentialities of fire and fury, of sullenness and of jealousy, as well as all her possibilities of passionate devotion, of the very sublimity of self-immolation for love's sake, were veiled but not hidden beneath that eloquent silence, that mask of repose; and St. Claire felt to his inmost being the presence of the passion he dared not analyze, of the power he could not match.

But if he had neither passion nor power to match Ione's, the affectionate sympathy as well as the poetic sentiment of his own nature was fully awakened and keenly alive. He pitied her as a human being, admired her as a woman, loved her as a sister. The time, the place, the whole surroundings were divine, full of spiritual intoxication, of subtle sensuous charm. He felt as if he should never forget the richness of beauty, the strange depth of tenderness which made this moment like one snatched from Heaven and the gods. It was a new experience to him, and called up something within him which even Monica had neither roused nor taught.

But at this moment he had forgotten Monica, and the world held only Ione as the supreme creation of the summer sunshine.

"I shall think of this place for ever, of this moment and you. When I leave I shall carry it as a picture always with me," he said abruptly.

Ione started when he spoke and looked at him with almost terror in her eyes.

"You are not going away?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes, soon—I must," he answered, and wondered why he found his voice so difficult to control.

She turned away her face. She knew that it was pale and full of distress, and she did not wish him to see it.

"I am sorry to leave," he continued, after a pause. "You have all been so good to me. I shall grieve to leave you."

"We have done nothing," said Ione, always in that low, half-suffocated voice.

"You have made my whole life here," he answered.

She looked down on him, sitting as it were at her feet, and the sudden flash of her eyes bewildered and disturbed him as of old. Then she dropped her broad lids as she plucked the petals off a rose grasped in her long white hand.

"I wish I were going to England too," she said. "I hate Sicily—I hate the Italians!"—she added fiercely.

The leaves of the thick hedge of myrtle and monthly rose behind them stirred suddenly as by a passing wind, or as if a large bird had flown heavily through the branches.

"Yet you are Italian in all but your colour," said St. Claire, meaning to please her by the ascription of beauty.

"Do not say that!" she cried. "I am English—pure English—English all through!"

"Yes? Then the sun has moulded you into the beauty of your adopted country," he said, looking at her with intense admiration and speaking in a voice like a caress.

She looked again at him as she had looked before—gathering up the praise, deprecating the connexion.

"You know that I am not a real daughter here?" she then said; "that I do not really belong to papa and mamma?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Who told you?" she asked.

"Your sister."

"Sister!" she repeated, raising her head; "I have

no sister—I have no one—no father nor mother—no brother—no friend—nothing in the whole world.”

“One friend—one always in me,” said Armine. “Remember—one always in me,” he repeated.

“Thank you,” she answered, bending lightly towards him.

A petal of her half-shattered rose fell on his upturned face. She had raised the flower to her lips as she bent, and it rested on his face warm with the touch of hers.

He took it in his hand.

“I will keep this for ever,” he said tenderly. “It will remind me of this hour, this place, and of you—always of you.”

Again he looked at her full of admiration, of sympathy, of poetry, of feeling; and again she turned away her face—not troubled this time, but too eloquent of something which it was due to maidenly pride to conceal.

The little line of sunlight had shifted its course, and now fell across and through the fringe of curls at the back of her neck. Oh that betraying sunlight and that subtle scent of rose and heliotrope which came from her fair young breast! Oh the songs of the birds, and the heavy odour of the orange-blossoms like an unseen cloud in the clear blue air!—and oh for the weakness of human nature, and the folly of a man who drifts through sentiment and is wrecked on the sunken rocks of poetry! Not savage nor animal—only sweet and loving and tender and weak; not able to control circumstances, nor grasping life with a firm hand as a man should—only able to steer clear of the current when on the alert, but carried by the tide where it

would when he let himself go—where was St. Claire now?—this man made after the model of a woman's mind and according to the dream of woman's fancy?

Her head was turned away; her heart was throbbing, till it made the flowers in her bosom palpitate as if with sentient life; her whole being was possessed and overmastered by a soft delicious trouble. And he—the influence of the moment overcame him. Nature and poetry, sense and compassion, were leagued against his better wisdom and stood between him and his truer self. With an impulse he could not control he raised himself from his sitting posture, and, with one knee on his low seat, put his hands on the arms of Ione's chair and kissed the side of her neck—there where the red-gold curl caught the yellow shine of the golden sun.

She turned and looked at him, her whole body quivering as if under an electric shock. Her eyes seemed to dazzle him with their strange unearthly light, and his seemed to her as the eyes of a god—loving, compassionate, divinely beautiful, and unfathomable as the source of life itself.

She laid her hands on his shoulders.

"You have come at last!" she said in a low soft voice like the very sigh of happiness. "Oh love! my love! at last!"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TOILS.

CAUGHT!—caught by the tide and swept away by the current; seduced by his amiability, by his weakness, by his pity, by his love; caught as hopelessly as is a swallow by bird-lime; allured as destructively as is a moth by the candle; attracted as by a magnet against his better judgment, his clearer will, his secret wish; caught, to be held as in a vice by those white young arms, fettered in the tangles of that red-gold hair, imprisoned in the depths of those lustrous eyes; caught, never to be free again, not though he should break his heart for remorse because of his infidelity and for pain because of his captivity;—yes, St. Claire was fairly taken in the net which Ione's sorrowful history had first woven, and his own weakness to pity finally closed, round him; and he would never be his own man again.

At Oakhurst, where he must return, lived Monica Barrington, in whose heart all his real love lay hidden. But he stood here in the sun-light in Palermo as the accepted lover of Ione Stewart; and he had not the moral courage to tell her that—time and space, flesh and spirit, the senses and the imagination, conspiring against him—his caress had been of impulse, not of design, the result of a moment's indiscretion and not

the deliberate expression of an honest man's deliberate choice.

Poor St. Claire! and, had she known, poor Ione! But she did not know. She, like all who love, created her own god and built up her own heaven. Her mind saw what it brought and worshipped what it made; and she never stopped to ask if the love and devotion with which she credited St. Claire were things which were, or things which she believed because she wished them to be.

How happy she was! Love had transformed her sorrowful sufferance of days to joyful mastery of life, and had given her a new moral being. Radiant and assured, she was no longer moody as of old. She had no more outbursts of jealous rage, no more spells of sullen silence, no more impatient dreams of impossible release from her uncongenial surroundings. She was now brighter than Clarissa, inasmuch as the sunshine is brighter than the moonlight; and even an enemy could scarcely have grudged the happiness which made her not only so infinitely more beautiful, but also so supremely fascinating and so amiable. How happy she was! For the first time in her life she was loved;—so she thought and believed, and belief is the same as knowledge;—loved as she loved, loved for herself and beyond all others. Hitherto she had been a pauper in the great world of love, seeing others enjoy the wealth which she was denied; now she was endowed more richly than the rest, and to the utmost of her desire. Hitherto she had been no one's special care; now she was an adored man's very heart and soul and centre of delight, his whole source of happiness, his whole treasure of joy. What more had she to ask of fate or

fortune? Nothing; save length of days for the full enjoyment of this bliss.

And all the time the whole thing was a delusion, and those Gardens of the Blessed wherein she walked were nothing but a mirage created by love and maintained by self-deception.

Too confident to be afraid of delusions, too happy to be clear-sighted, Ione gave herself up to the enchantment which she herself thus wove about her life. All that she had ever pictured of blessedness was now fulfilled, and nothing disturbed her belief in her sure possession. She loved and was beloved. Let all the rest go as the dust which falls from the diamond when the crowning facet is being cut!

It was very different with St. Claire. The responsibility of worldly matters, and that, far more important, of the truth of things, rested with him; and he knew what Ione did not. And, first, there was that humiliating question of ways and means to be dealt with, and that terrible wolf hovering on the horizon to be shown as an all-too certain visitor to the house-door in the future. It was not a pleasant moment for him when he had to explain to Captain Stewart the poverty-stricken character of his schedule; and how, for all his foolish action which had let loose the flood and set fire to the wood, he was absolutely unable to keep a wife, unless she had money on her own side. And he knew that Ione had none. But it had to come. Sooner or later the truth had to come out; and when the Captain, in his quality of guardian, demanded an explanation, St. Claire, in his character of lover, had to give it, and to stand the brunt of the blow to follow.

Captain Stewart was intensely annoyed by the whole affair. He was annoyed to find that his estimate of St. Claire's social position, as represented by his cash-box, was false; and that, so far from being a prince in disguise, he was little better than a pauper in masquerade; annoyed that this pauper should have committed Ione to an engagement when he had no substantial home to offer, damaging her future chances by just so much of the fine down as is rubbed off a girl's repute by a confessed betrothal brought to naught; annoyed that the truth had not been told from the beginning, when he might have better controlled the intercourse between themselves and this handsome young Lazarus dressed in the robes of Dives, and thus have kept his own out of danger; annoyed that he, the careful father of a prize daughter, should ever have been so far imposed on as to imagine the possibility of an alliance between his pearl Clarissa and this very profitless pebble from the waste lands of fortune; annoyed with everything, from beginning to end; and therefore, being annoyed, he was disagreeable and unsympathetic.

"I should be sorry to take her into poverty," said St. Claire, looking handsome and penitent after he had made his unpleasant confession and tabulated the humiliating score of his finances.

"You should have thought of that before," said the Captain, speaking with vicious deliberation; and St. Claire answered meekly:—

"I own that I have done wrong. I should, as you say, have thought of all that before."

"But now what do you intend to do?" asked Captain Stewart, in the tone of one to whom the whole

thing was perfectly indifferent. "Are you going on with the engagement?"

"I have not fortune enough to marry on," said St. Claire.

"Then you will break it off?"

"What else can I do? I have no home fit for your daughter to go to," he answered.

"You must tell that to Ione yourself," said Captain Stewart, knowing the nature of the task imposed.

"I am so sorry to give her pain!" Armine rather sighed than said.

"According to your own account of things it has to come," returned the Captain coldly. "Sooner or later she has to learn that you do not intend to marry her."

"That I cannot," said St. Claire.

"Which comes to the same thing," replied the other.

"My miserable folly!" said Armine with a groan, his fingers drumming nervously on the table.

"It is rather late in the day to bemoan that," said the Captain grimly. "What you have to do now is to redeem your word like a man, or break it like a man. To sit there weakly bewailing your folly is the act of a woman; and calling yourself a fool does not excuse you for having been one!"

His contempt was sharp and wounding; but it was wholesome, in that it roused St. Claire, and spurred him to some show of self-defence.

"No man is proof against a moment's weakness," he said, with a certain kind of angry dignity that became him.

"Evidently, if there are such men, you are not one of them," returned the Captain contemptuously.

"You are hard on me, Captain Stewart."

"Because I despise your weakness? Would you have me admire what will cost that poor girl more than I care to think of?"

"I will trust to her generosity to forgive me, and to her common-sense to see things rationally," said St. Claire.

"Va bene," replied the Captain drily, "I hope you will find what you look for. But we have high authority for saying that reeds when they are leaned on have the trick of breaking and piercing the hand which trusts them."

"Ione must see for herself that she cannot share my poverty. You yourself would not permit it," said St. Claire at bay.

"Do not mix me up in the affair," said the Captain sternly. "It is your own affair."

"And yours," persisted Armine.

"No, not mine in any way," said the Captain. "I do not forbid the marriage, and I do not desire it; I throw no obstacle in the way, and I make nothing smooth. If you choose to take the girl, penniless as she is, and begin the battle of life together, you may. Others have married on meagre allowance and thriven well after; and there is no reason why you should not do the same if you wished it. But I do not counsel it—as little as I forbid it. You and she must settle it between you."

"It is impossible!" said St. Claire.

Captain Stewart shrugged his shoulders.

"You are master of the situation—that is, so far as Ione allows you to be," he said, with exasperating dryness. "Her hand is rather a tight one when she closes it."

"I understand you, Captain Stewart; and I accept the whole responsibility," said Armine, feeling that he made no way here, and indeed was only losing time, strength, and patience in the struggle.

And with this he rose and went out to Ione, waiting for him under the shade of the carruba-tree in the rose-garden, feeling that he carried her death in his hand, and in his own heart the consciousness of sin from which, come what might, he should never be free again. Bound or released, he had done that which he could not undo; and, end as the thing might, some one must suffer;—all because of his weakness to pity, and the seduction of nature and the senses to which he had yielded for that brief but fatal moment.

The day was just as beautiful as that on which he had abandoned the guidance of reason to drift rudderless on the treacherous sea of impulse and emotion. But how changed everything was for him! Nature had lost her spell, and the influences created by sun and shadow, by the songs of the birds, the scents of the flowers, the voices of the day, were as different now from what they had been then as sobriety is different from intoxication, remorse from passion, death from life. Even Ione, sitting in exactly the same place and pose on that curule-shaped garden-chair, was not the Ione of that fatal day. She, like Nature, had lost her charm; and the broken spell no longer worked. The sun shone in that same narrow line across her head and neck, and touched the red-gold hair with shining yellow; but St. Claire had no inclination now to kneel on the seat by her side and kiss that living tracery. He only wondered how he had ever suffered himself to be caught by so slight a thing; and for the

first time in his life he despised himself as having done that which he would not have done had he had the self-control which had been his safeguard in Oakhurst.

And yet, how sorry he felt for the poor girl, knowing as he did what was to come;—how miserably guilty when he saw the exquisite smile of loving happiness that broke like sunlight over her face as he drew near and she, without rising but bending forward, held out both her hands to him, palm upwards, as if it were the offering of herself and her very soul made to that great god Love! He saw all her love; all her confidence in him and her future happiness; all her trust and joy and glad security; and he knew that he was about to destroy her whole life as her reward for loving him and believing in him.

He went up to her sadly; and despite the blinding fervour of her passion, the sensitiveness of her love told her that danger was before her.

“Are you well?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes—no—not too well—not much amiss with me,” he answered in confusion.

“Something is wrong—what is it?” asked Ione, in a soft, sweet, sympathetic manner—so unlike the arid egotism of the past.

“Something is indeed very wrong,” said St. Claire.

She opened her large eyes and looked at him, not in fear, rather in defiance of all evil possibilities that should come between them—given his life and her own.

“What is it?” she asked again. “Has papa been unkind?”

“Not that so much as that I have been foolish,” returned Armine.

She turned as white as the datura in her hand.

"What have you done?" she asked, her head bent down; then she raised it and looked at him full of love and confidence. "You cannot have done anything wrong or foolish!" she said, with a sudden abandonment of suspicion for love. It was like a caress—as if she had put her arms about his neck and kissed him on the lips.

"Yes, both wrong and foolish," persisted poor St. Claire. "I have made you love me, Ione, and I have no means on which to marry."

He said this with a headlong rush, strange for one so sweet and measured as he always was. It was as if he had flung himself off the firm land and dashed down into the depths where he knew neither his probable foothold nor his ultimate destination.

"You have made me love you, and you have no means on which to marry?" repeated Ione slowly. "Are you very poor?"

She asked this as calmly, almost glacially, as if she were not interested; as if it were of some one else, not herself, of whom she was speaking.

"Yes, very poor. I have nothing," he answered.

"You have a profession and a home," she said.

"A profession which gives me a bare subsistence, and a home which is not fit for you to share," was his reply.

"If fit for you it is for me. Where you are I can be. And I can help you in your work," said Ione, raising her eyes to his.

"My poor child, that is impossible!" said St. Claire. "How could you help me?"

"I could, if I tried," repeated Ione.

"No, no, that is not to be thought of," he returned. "I have been rash, selfish, inconsiderate, Ione, and you must forget me and forgive me, if you can."

"I am to forget you?" repeated Ione, going back to the uninterested and glacial manner she had had before.

"Yes," he said, taking her hand. "I am not worthy of your thoughts."

"This means that you want to break off the engagement?" she asked.

"I must. I have not money enough to marry," he replied.

Neither looked at the other. Ione's eyes were on the ground, his were strained to the far distance seen through an opening made by the trees, which framed the sea as if in a picture—to the far distance, beyond which lived Monica.

"And it is only because you are poor that you want to break it off?" Ione asked quite quietly.

How he wished that she would speak with passion—that she would look angry, revolted, proud, indignant, and not remain sealed and bound in this unnatural calmness!

"Yes, only," he said in reply.

She turned to him suddenly and looked at him as if reading his soul while giving her own.

"Tell me the very truth, Armine," she said. "Nothing stands between us but want of money? If there were money you would not wish to break off the engagement? It is only because of poverty? There is nothing else? Is this the whole truth?" she repeated.

She forced him to look at her by the very domination of her love. Her eyes were as pathetic as are the

Cenci's. Her parted lips were parched and strained; her quivering nostrils seemed to breathe out the agony of the Medusa; the long white hand had closed on his with a convulsive grasp; her body was bent slightly forward; and she looked like one whose life is hanging on the verdict to be given.

His heart failed him. He could not tell her the true truth. It would be too cruel. He could not confess to her that he did not love her while she looked like this—that she had simply wakened his pity and stirred his emotions for a moment, while his heart, his love, his devotion were all another's for perpetuity. He could not return her truth of passion by the confession of mere weakness to his own impulse. It would be too shameful! He must lie to her, and trust that God would forgive the sin for the sake of the motive.

"It is only my poverty," he said in a low voice.

"You love me, Armine, do you not?" she continued, the strain increasing.

"Who would not, Ione?" he answered, soft, yielding, pitiful, as he was so sure to be.

"Me and me only?" she asked, forcing him still to look at her.

Her face was still that of Medusa in her agony—superhuman in anguish, superhuman in beauty—pleading for mercy under the guise of patience in suffering. He could not bear it. It was like putting a knife to her throat; and he could not!

"Yes, you and you only," he said; but he turned away his eyes as he spoke.

"Swear it!" she said in a deep voice, her hand still clasping his as if in a vice.

"My word is enough," was his reply.

"Then I care for nothing else!" she said, sinking back in her chair with the long-drawn sigh of one relieved from intolerable pain. "If you love me, Armine, all will be well with us. I will work for you; I will help you. I will be your good angel!" she added passionately; "and I will make your life so happy that you shall not know a day or hour of pain. If you love me, I fear nothing in heaven or earth. The desert with you better than paradise without you! If you deceive me—if you do not love me," she added in a concentrated kind of voice, suddenly breaking through her exaltation and falling back on her old jealousies and suspicion—her face livid, her eyes alight with flame—"if ever you leave off loving me, if ever you deceive me, I will kill myself, Armine! I have thrown all my happiness on you. If you fail me I shall die!"

"I am not worthy of so much devotion," said Armine in torture. "I am a miserable wretch, contemptible to myself."

"Do not! do not! I will not hear that!" cried Ione, laying her hand imperatively on his mouth. "You shall not say such things of yourself. You insult my love when you do. You are so good, so true, so noble—you are worthy of any woman's love, even of a queen's! But no one will ever love you as I do," she added. "No one could!"

"But, Ione, my beautiful Ione, be reasonable!—we must be reasonable! Love will not keep us," urged poor St. Claire. "We must come down to material considerations, and think of ways and means."

"Love will keep us," she said. "It shall! You do

not know what a good wife I shall make," she added firmly. "I have never had fair play here. When I am happy and with you I shall be so different! Oh, we are not to be separated for the want of a little money, and because you are afraid I shall suffer!" she added passionately. "That would be sacrificing the true for the false, the real for the seeming."

"You do not know what you are undertaking," said Armine. "You do not understand poverty. After your life here, where you have had everything you can possibly wish for, it will be terrible to you to feel that you have to curtail every desire—maddening to me to see you want and I not able to supply. It will break my heart," he added with genuine tenderness, imagination and pity making together a very good simulacrum of love.

"It would not break mine if I wanted all the world so long as I had you," said Ione. "Only love me, Armine—love me as you love me now, and poverty will be more delightful to me than riches. The day when you no longer love me I shall kill myself—or you," she said, with a sudden resumption of her former manner, her face livid, her eyes mere glittering lines between her narrowed lids, her hands clasped in each other with so much force that the knuckles were white and the flesh indented, her voice lowered to a kind of hiss—the snake, the panther, the wild beast, the demon that was in her roused and erect at the mere thought of her lover's infidelity.

At this moment Vincenzo passed before the two, and his shadow fell on them as they sat there beneath the carruba-tree. His broad face was set into its usual smile like an antique mask, but his eyes were burning

coals as he doffed his cap and looked at the lovers askance, and so passed on with his noiseless step—the first omen of their betrothal.

“But that day will never come, will it, Armine?” Ione added caressingly, coming back to her loveliest and most seductive self. “You love me as I love you, and you will be as little false to me as I to you? Is it not so? You could not be false, Armine?”

“No, I could not!” said Armine, taking her in his arms and kissing her—overborne by her stronger personality, by her greater intensity of love—overborne, and not able to free himself, though the end of the world should come upon him.

And she, poor passionate Ione, did not see that nothing save her own passion existed between them, and that all the rest was glamour created only by herself. She did not feel that his kiss was only responsive; that his love was only pity; that his acquiescence in things as they stood was because of his inability to give pain, and not by the living will of passion. She gave what she had, and saw what she brought; and she desired no more than that which she believed she possessed. It was phantasmagoric, if one will; but what else is all life?—what else all love?

The engagement then was resumed and re-announced, and that wolf on the horizon was accepted as part of the condition of things, together with the bouquet and the ring. The family was the soul of complaisance, and deeply imbued with the sacred principles of liberty and the right of each individual to regulate his or her own life. Ione was of age; St. Claire knew his own mind. Who then had a right to interfere or object? Their congratulations had perhaps

a certain false note of contempt in them; but Ione's happiness made her so comfortable to live with, they could not but rejoice in their own share of the good afloat. Moreover, they were glad to get rid of her. Taking her at all as one of themselves, and an adopted daughter second only to Clarissa, had been one of those mistakes which are sometimes made by arbitrary men when married to weak but persistent women. Captain Stewart had overborne his wife's opposition, but he had never been able to conquer her repugnance. Her own nature made her just, but Ione's had not won her love; so that the plan had not worked well for the happiness of the home, and the Captain had more than once secretly repented of his own masterful determination. Nevertheless, he always maintained when twitted with this failure that he had done what was right, and that he would do just the same had it to come over again.

Now, when the girl was to pass into other keeping, he was free to rejoice at the cessation of his own guardianship, and free to confess that a weight was taken off his hands which gave him the sense of relief.

So these latter days passed on velvet for all save St. Claire, and for him they were beset with thorns and spikes and burning ploughshares almost unendurable. But as he never found the courage to say to Ione: "I do not love you, and I do love some one else," he had to abide by his miserable portion, where the only solace was his belief that he was securing her happiness at the cost of his own.

CHAPTER III.

FOR ALL TIME.

THERE was no question of an immediate marriage following on this rash engagement between Armine and Ione. On the contrary, it was agreed that he should return to Oakhurst for the summer—and the winter too, if his peccant chest would stand the strain—and in the spring of next year he was to come back to Palermo for his bride; if by that time he had a fitting home for a wife. This gave him a little breathing-time and loosened the yoke by just so much. It also, he thought, would enable him to make arrangements for leaving Oakhurst altogether. He would exchange his practice for one which did not include Monica Barrington as a possible patient; which did not necessitate his carrying a wife to the Dower House, as a proof of how loyally he had sealed his allegiance in his heart and how faithful he had been to his love and his ideal.

It was like staving off the evil day of payment to a man who has sold his soul to the devil, or given a bill to a creditor. If not redemption, it was at least delay; and a straw to the drowning man gives a moment's hope of salvation.

What was the chance of salvation to Armine, to Ione was the possibility of destruction. She would rather have been married now without delay, suitable

home or not; and the restrictions imposed by prudence galled her as those other bonds galled her beloved. With the superstitious fears born of love, she was afraid of all probable and improbable dangers. This temporary separation was as grievous to her as an eternal farewell, and she saw in it the shapes of all the disasters which could possibly befall both her and the man she loved so blindly and so well. She might have fever and die, or he might be wrecked off the island of Capri on his return to the mainland; she might lose her beauty by small-pox, or he might be taken by brigands in the giro, which, as an intelligent tourist, he was bound to make before leaving the island; he might offend a mafiose and be shot—a camorrista, and be stabbed; he might drink in typhus at Naples, or breathe in a perniciosa at Rome; the train by which he travelled might run off the line; the boat by which he crossed the Channel might be lost in a fog; it was quite in the circle of possibilities that some dreadful mishap should touch him, and then what would be her life? She longed to go with him that she might at least share his fate; for, strong as the love of life was in her, the love of him who, she believed, loved her, was stronger, and she would rather have died with him than have lived without him.

If she had but known the truth!—that truth which was confusion of desire and chaos of thought, as now pity for Ione and now love for Monica, and now again anger and contempt for himself dominated him—that truth which was to-day consciousness of the splendid personality of the one, to-morrow yearning memories of the spiritualized beauty of the other, with remorse for the infidelity into which he had been seduced and

for the deception to which he stood committed—that truth which, beneath the appearance of glad submission to the sweet bondage of his own love, was dumb revolt against the tyranny of hers;—had she but known all this, what a fatal end to the cloud-built palaces wherein her soul dwelt royally to the enchanted visions which her love transformed to solid facts! But, blinded as she was by the effulgence of her own passion, she saw nothing of what was, and dreamed away her life in the serene assurance that her enchantments were realities. Whether those dreams of hers came through the gate of ivory or that of horn was a thing she never asked herself. They were beautiful; they were intoxicating; they made her life like some stately poem, her love like some noble chant; and she peeped behind no blanket of the dark, simply for lack of suspicion that anything was to be seen were she to look.

So the time passed, golden-winged and rosy-fingered to her, leaden-footed and griffin-clawed to him; and then the day came when he must leave his weeping love, sad as ever was Ariadne, and go on the giro like the rest.

Change of scene and recovery of personal liberty brought to St. Claire that feeling of relief which is the true gauge of pressure. He was no longer the slave of his own pity and the captive of a woman's love. He was free once more, and might think and act as seemed to him best. The farther he was removed from Ione's direct influence, the more surely he came back to himself, and the more impossible seemed the marriage. Putting his own feelings out of court, and forgetting Monica, he said to himself—standing on the ground of common-sense—what had he to marry on? He

who could scarcely keep himself, to think of adding a wife and probable children—it was folly to imagine such a thing; it would be a crime to translate that imagination into action. He pictured to himself his life such as it would be with Ione and poverty; the sordid struggles, the miserable needs, the want of order in the home, the want of harmony in their natures; and, on his side, the want of abiding love. He saw himself at Oakhurst married by the law to one woman, dedicated in heart and soul to another; with Monica's sweet grave eyes looking at him, half in sorrow, half in wonder, at his speedy consolation. This vision haunted him night and day, and seemed to stamp itself as with a red-hot iron into his brain. No, he could not face it!—he could not! He must write to Palermo and end that which ought never to have been begun. It would be a pain to poor Ione now; but marriage would be a greater pain to her hereafter; and of the two it was better to inflict the lesser and more transient than to let her undergo the larger and more enduring. She would learn to reconcile herself in time—to forget him, and perhaps to despise and hate him. The thought was grievous enough to one so sensitive and affectionate as he; but anything was better than things as they were at present!

He was full of all this while he went the prescribed round—startling the panting little lizards among the ruins of Girgenti; tracing out the lines where was fought at Syracuse that great battle which redeemed Sicily and ruined Athens; remembering Arethusa in her fountain and Galatea at Aci Reale; reconstructing the past and repeopling the void as he stood, bathed in the silver of the moonlight or glorified by the sun-

rise, in the ruined theatre at Taormina; catching the burning blood-red beauty of the pomegranates and the waxen sweetness of the oleander, as he steamed through that exquisite tract which lies between Taormina and Messina;—but, wherever he went, feeling the difficulties of his position, and fuller of his own troubles than of the things about him.

This feeling of difficulty grew, as of course it would, and his courage strengthened with time and distance; so that when he was at Messina he wrote to Captain Stewart, repeating what he had said before—that he was too poor to marry as things were, and that he saw no prospect in the future of making such an income as would enable him to take a dowerless wife. His health was delicate; his friends were few; his outlook was dark; his horizon was narrow, and ever peopled with those fearful shapes of poverty and want and the gaunt wolf so sure to prowl about the door. In all these circumstances, then, he was bound as a man of honour to give up the engagement and restore Ione to freedom and her friends.

And then, because he was pitiful and kind-hearted, and more easily stirred by emotional impulse than became a man, he wrote to Ione more strongly than he really felt thinking to soften the blow to her by expressing himself as broken-hearted in losing her.

And indeed at the moment he was deeply moved, thinking of the girl's sorrow, her beauty, and her love, till his eyes grew moist, and a tear fell from his long lashes on to the paper and blotted what he had written.

His decision was accepted by Captain Stewart in a curt letter of few words and no regrets. Ione did

not write at all. But, as she was naturally represented by her adopted father, her silence was of the kind which affirms and consents; and St. Claire was once more free. He felt stronger and stouter, more manly altogether, than he had felt ever since that fatal day when the sunshine had bewildered him and his own weakness had overpowered him—when the story of Pygmalion had been renewed to his shame and Ione's misery. As he went on board the boat at Messina, setting his face towards Naples and leaving Sicily in the shadow of the past, his whole being was full of that divine sense of freedom which seemed to make up for all the rest. He was free—free to think of Monica and to forget Ione—free to love and live as he would, without any person's claim or right intervening—free to feel that he had acted as an honourable man should—that he had reasserted his manhood and his strength; and saved Ione from poverty and distress.

And yet her unfathomable eyes every now and then seemed to flash like light before him, and he felt a certain pain at his heart, a certain oppression of soul and sense when he thought of her there in her loneliness and sorrow, and knew by his own experience what she suffered.

His mind was tossed and racked between self-condemnation and self-excuse. It had been all his fault, all his sin, that she was so unhappy now. He had been weak and wicked. Yet, what had he done that was so heinous?—given her a kiss. Was that such a crime that he should be required to expiate it with the happiness of his life, with perjury and deceit? It was morbid to condemn himself so severely—worse than

morbid to give it such enduring effects. She and her people had taken him too seriously. The mischief had lain here, and not in his innocent kiss, which ought to have committed him to as little as it meant. He reasoned himself into a tolerably calm frame of mind for one hour; but the next his troublesome conscience made itself heard in spite of his efforts to silence it, and he suffered the tortures inevitable to folly when a man's heart is good, and his will has no backbone worth speaking of.

He was thinking all this one morning while sitting in the Villa at Naples, drinking in the sunlight but scarcely delighting in its charm. He had halted for a day or two on the way; for, though he was so much stronger and better altogether for his sojourn at Palermo, he was not able to bear great fatigue. And he had to husband his strength for his long journey home.

While sitting there with his air of disguised prince, he saw a tall slight figure coming slowly through the trees. Her cream-coloured dress, with its old-gold trimmings hanging in straight folds to her feet and clinging to her figure—her hat with its cream-coloured feathers tipped with old-gold—her gait and height, all suggested Ione. But surely it was only a fond suggestion of his fancy. It was impossible to be Ione; impossible! It might as easily be Monica herself—and yet how like!—literally and in very truth, how awfully like Ione!

The figure came slowly forward, looking to the right and the left as if searching for some one. As it neared him St. Claire saw the face—the yellow-hazel eyes which burned like living fire from under the level brows—the red-gold hair that caught the sunlight in

its crossing threads till it glistened like a metallic aureole about her head—the lips apart as of one in mortal agony—the nostrils dilated and quivering with pain—the face that of the Medusa, beautiful, young, a goddess under torture, a woman in her moment of despair—yes, it was she; it was Ione! He was here and she was there, and only a few feet of earth divided them. The sea had been bridged over; time and distance were no more than thoughts; she had come to seek him in his flight—and she had found him.

As she saw him she gave a little cry and came up to him, holding out her hands palm upwards, with the same gesture of self-giving as she had made under the carruba-tree.

“I have come to you because I cannot live without you,” she said in answer to his half-terrified exclamation. “It was worse than death to be there without you, Armine, and I would rather die than live if I am to live away from you.”

“My poor girl! poor Ione! you have ruined both yourself and me,” said Armine, with the very quietness of despair.

Of what use to struggle when the end has come?

“Do not scold me, Armine,” she said with strange humbleness. “If you love me as you say, you know by your own heart that I could do nothing else. How could I live without you or you without me? You knew that I would come. You knew that I would either drown myself in the sea or come to you. There was no help for it. And I knew that you wanted me!” she added, turning to him with all a woman’s grace of self-bestowal when she confesses her own passion as a response to her lover’s.

What can a man do with the unwelcome devotion of a woman? Reject it?—flying it back in her face like the dust of dead men's bones and the refuse of used things? But if he himself has been the cause? If he has made her believe that he loved her and wanted her love in return? And if she be young and beautiful, and of a kind whom even a prince, disguised or not, might be proud to win and wear?—how as a man of honour can he?—how as a man of flesh and blood is it possible? Even one who is all soul, and out of whom the beast has been eliminated, even he must pause before such a manifestation, staggered, and in some sense intoxicated.

It was to no good that Armine had tried to convince himself that he had not been to blame, and that really an innocent little kiss on the back of a girl's neck ought not to have entailed all these grave consequences. It was of no use! He had been foolish, putting it at the best and mildest; and having been foolish he must pay for his folly. He had made the girl believe that he loved her, and she had taken him at his own showing. He had told her that his heart was broken, his life desolate, his future dark without her, and she had come to give him joy by the wealth of her love, sunshine by the warmth of her passion. Was this a time to think of maidenly modesty? of virginal reserve?—a time to wonder if she had not transgressed the strict bounds of both? Maidenly modesty and virginal reserve are jewels in the crown of womanhood; granted. But if love thinks that love craves? If the only barrier between happiness and the beloved is conventional prudence, are there not times and seasons when, to the loving, Society is only

the ghost of a dead pedant, and Nature and Love are the living lords?

A woman is of flesh and blood all the same as a man, and Ione's flesh and blood were more vitalized than were most. It was all because of her belief that Armine loved her and had given her up for her good against his own desire. Had she suspected the arid truth she would indeed have flung herself into the sea rather than have crossed it. For it is one thing for a woman to offer of her own free will the love which she believes is desired though not sought, and another to ask for a response to her own passion which has sprung up spontaneously, neither sought nor desired. The one comes into the list of heroic deeds, the other into that of follies which are also crimes against oneself. And Ione's was of the former.

Armine's emotion overcame him. It was not all the emotion of joy, but it was not all that of repugnance. He was a man, though a weak one, and he could not but feel the full force of the tremendous thing she had done for him. It would be his ruin and hers; nevertheless it was heroic, royal, sublime. And she was so beautiful, and her passionate devotion was so sincere!

"Do you really give me up for poverty only?" she asked after a pause, her soul stirring like a drugged sleeper half awakening. "You do love me as I love you, do you, do you not?"

Pitiful and kindly, weak and warmed by her love to something of its own fire, he could not undeceive her. She had come to him for love and joy, believing in him, trusting in him, loving him; and he could not give her sorrow and truth instead of that which she came to find—and to give.

"Yes," he said steadily; "I do love you, Ione. It is only because of poverty that I gave you up."

"Then I care for nothing now in the world!" said Ione, with the air and manner of one who has gained the victory. "If you love me—basta! I will work for you; I will be your good genius, Armine; and you shall find all things better because of me. Only love me as I love you and all will go well. Love me, and for ever after you shall have reason to bless the day when I took my life in my own hands and came to lay it in yours."

She poured out her love as a flood wherein he was overwhelmed—she wrapped him in it as a garment of fire that clung closer than his own flesh; he could not resist her—no man could!—and he was swept away by the torrent and burnt by the fire. There was no other course open to him, and he had only to accept his position and legalize hers. He must make her his wife, ruin or not, and save her from the consequences of the folly she had committed for love of him. It was easy to say that he was weak and that he ought not to have yielded, but there are times in one's life when self-sacrifice is the bravest action and perjury to the past the first virtue; and this was one of them.

Wherefore he wrote to Captain Stewart and told him all that had been and all that was to be; and how, as soon as things could be legally arranged, he would marry Ione at the Consulate. He ended by expressing a hope that he, the Captain, Ione's adopted father, and Mrs. Stewart, her adopted mother, would come over to Naples to give their sanction to the ceremony.

"But they will not," said Ione, when he read the

letter to her. "I know them, Armine; you do not. They will not," she repeated, when he combated her dictum by the baseless "hope" of that superficial optimism which simply refuses to see the bad side of things because they are disagreeable to look at.

She proved herself right. To Armine's letter came, as a reply, certain legal documents by which Captain Stewart gave his consent to the marriage; three boxes, full of everything that could be said to belong to Ione—all her clothes, her trinkets, her girlish treasure, her books, her music, her very wrecks and relics of childish toys—all her property, down to the veriest bits of rubbish;—but for reply to the request of her adopted parents' presence to sanction the marriage, simply two lines: "We desire to hear no more of you or of her. She is dead to us for ever."

Thus the two began life together alone and absolutely isolated from all family connections whatsoever—she loving him with the whole force of her passion, the whole creative power of her imagination—he loving Monica, but resolved to bury her sweet image deep in the unfathomable recesses of his heart, and to do his duty to the girl who, for love of him, had not done it to herself.

CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS THE AISLE.

It was a cold, dim, drizzly day when Armine and his bride came to Oakhurst—one of those three bad days in May when we are forced to shiver in dolorous penance for the premature warmth of April. True, the fields were green and the young leaves of the trees were laced with gold or flushed with crimson, but the heavy sky was leaden, overclouded, weeping, and no colour had its value for want of sunlight to give it life. True, too, the banks and hedgerows were starred with wild flowers and festooned with fragrant climbing-plants, and the trees and bushes were full of bloom; but the dead air brought forth no perfume from hawthorn or from lilac, from primrose-bank or cowslip meadow, and the flowers themselves gave one the impression of being asleep and silent. No birds sang from the trees with that delirious passion, that joyful ecstasy proper to the springtime and eloquent of the future summer; only a few nest-calls here and there broke the silence of the woods—only the faint murmur of the bees among the lime-blossoms overhead, like confused voices heard from afar, spoke of the continued activities of life and nature. All was cold, colourless, depressed, dreary. It was an English spring at its worst moment—the moment which justifies the dwellers in those southern climes where the sun ever

shines in their cynical belief that in England the sun never shines at all. It was as if a key-note had been struck by nature prefacing the theme on which man was hereafter to enlarge. And indeed the things human of this day were, for Armine and Ione, only too closely in accord with those of nature.

The young couple entered on their home-life absolutely unwelcomed. No greeting friend met them at the station; no beaming face looked out from door nor window to watch them pass and smile a kindly welcome; no warm, frank hand pressed theirs as they drove up to the dingy little house where Armine's slender income was made; only the one woman servant of the establishment—over-dressed, acrimonious, offended by the delay of the train and already hostile to the new arrangements—and the rough-headed stable-man, seemed to have known of their existence, or to have looked for their arrival. The very locum tenens himself, good Mr. Benjamin Hoskins, was unavoidably absent from the house; and thus it was that the two young people came to their home without recognition or congratulation from any one.

Never was a colder, duller, less genial reception of a beautiful bride; and Armine's kind heart was pained as he noticed the universal neglect of the neighbourhood, and thought of the pinched poverty and social isolation to which her love for him had doomed Ione.

How sorry he was for her!—how sorry, too, for himself!—and how much he regretted that which no regrets could now undo! This terrible Frankenstein of disaster which had sprung from that one impulsive and innocent little kiss!

Ione did not seem to feel the want which was

only too palpable to St. Claire. As they crossed the threshold of her uninviting home, she laid her hand on his with a loving gesture—a gesture, however, which had none of that shy submission, that caressing timidity so essentially feminine—but a gesture which expressed a love too energetic to be submissive, too assured to be shy, too intense to be circumspect. Turning to him, she looked into his face with eyes which seemed to claim him as her own—eyes which had never looked at him as yet with aught but the adoration of love. She did not see the ugliness of her surroundings—she saw only the beauty of her husband; and the universal neglect which had chilled him was to her non-existent, warmed as she was with the fire of her own heart.

But for all that hidden warmth she could not resist the physical influences of time and place; and as she went into the cold and gloomy sitting-room she shivered and drew her light mantle closer round her.

“Are you cold, dear?” asked Armine tenderly.

“Yes, horribly,” she answered frankly. “How cold it is! Does it always rain like this, Armine?”

“No; not always,” he said with a smile. Then, turning to the woman, he added: “Light a fire, Mary, will you?”

“If you wish it, sir,” said Mary, her voice both sharp and reluctant.

“Certainly I wish it,” he answered.

“But the bright bars are in, doctor,” she returned, with a certain acrid familiarity not reassuring.

“And what of that?” said Armine, to whom bright bars were unknown mysteries.

"Perhaps your good lady knows?" said Mary, looking at Ione curiously.

She was more than doubtful if the good lady, with her foreign eyes and touzled hair, knew anything so civilized. Word had gone through the place that the young doctor had married a heathen papist—a black-amoor—maybe a Hottentot; and Ione's passable if not quite perfect English and red-gold hair, which Mary mentally called a carrotty mop, had surprised and in a certain sense disconcerted the woman. Perhaps, after all, she might even know the sacred meaning of bright bars and recognize the iniquity of fires in May? At all events, Mary made the cast, and waited for the result.

Ione looked at her with the haughtiness, the insolence, which the opposition of her social inferiors always roused in her. These late days of happiness in the fancied security of her love had not made her democratically amiable to all the world, though they had made her so soft and sweet to Armine; and she had already taken one of those instinctive dislikes to this woman to which all nervous organizations are liable—dislikes which are to the moral nature what fear and horror are to the physical.

"I know nothing about your absurd bright bars," she answered. "Light a fire at once; do you hear?"

"We do not do such things here, Mrs. St. Claire; but of course if you wish it—you are mistress here now, and the bright bars are none of my business, for I won't clean them again," said Mary insolently.

She was indignant at being spoken to with authority by a lady; as is the way with women who have been used only to the slack commandership of a master;

and she had moreover that odd contempt for Ione's evident unaccustomedness to English habits of life which uneducated people feel for all difference of ways and ignorance of local custom.

"Do as you are told, and hold your tongue," said Ione harshly. Then, as Mary after a moment's hesitation left the room muttering angrily to herself, she said to Armine, with some surprise: "What a horrid, rude, cross old wretch that is! How different from that good old Amarella or that dear kind Vincenzo!" she added, her thoughts turning back with their first shadow of regret to the soft complaisance which was the rule in her old home. There both men and women would have promised "mountains and seas," if that would have contented her, and made her forget her inconvenient desire till the time for fulfilment had passed. But if she had persisted, they would have said "a suo comodo" with resignation, mentally repeating an Ave to make heavenly capital out of their earthly trouble, or fortifying themselves with those two camels of endurance—"coraggio" and "pazienza." And here this hard, ugly, over-dressed woman made a scene about lighting a fire when it was as cold as winter—a thing which those dear slipshod, untidy, and good-natured creatures would have done of their own accord.

It was another jarring note in what should have been the day's glad symphony; but Ione was too happy to allow herself to be seriously impressed by even this uncomfortable little scene—this small act of strife as the first event of her home-life.

"At all events I have you," she said, turning to Armine with her imperious love; "and you will never

fail me, will you?" she asked, her hand on his shoulder.

"No," said Armine, speaking as if in a dream.

He was standing by the table, holding in his hand an envelope addressed to Mr. Benjamin Hoskins, and looking intently at the writing. It was Monica's.

"What are you thinking of, Armine?" asked Ione, her hand tightening on his shoulder.

Underneath the soft overlay of her love struck the sharper accent of suspicion, the rougher note of jealousy.

"Nothing," answered Armine, just a shade of coldness in his face and manner.

"Something has annoyed you," she persisted, her yellow-hazel eyes beginning to glitter. "What is that envelope?"

"You see," he said; "an envelope."

"Whose writing is it, Armine?"

"How should I know?" he answered evasively. "It is not addressed to me."

"Then what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Ione, nothing! You lose your time in watching me so closely. It is nothing," he repeated. Then he added, by a happy after-thought—more happy than true: "I am only sorry that Mary was so rude to you."

"Oh, if that is all, it is nothing," she answered, the glitter passing out of her eyes and the softness of love returning to them. "Cross, horrid old wretch, I do not care what she says! But she shall go if she is rude. I will not keep her if she is insolent; and even as it is she shall go."

And as she said these words Mary came into the room, having halted outside the door to listen.

"Yes, Mrs. St. Claire," she said viciously, flinging down the bundle of "kindling" she was carrying; "I am quite willing to go. We are not used to be treated like slaves here, like what you are in those heathen lands you come from. And what is more, I for one won't be, neither. So, if you please, suit yourself this day month; and I hope you'll get some one who will take as much care of the things, and work early and late for poor food and low wage, as I have done."

And with this, forgetting all about the fire and the bright bars, she left the room in a fury and slammed the door after her so that the whole house shook.

Armine looked vexed; Ione at first amazed and then furious.

"What a bad, insolent old woman!" she said angrily. "She deserves a good beating. I should like to fling her out of the house this instant! Send her away, Armine, at once. Send for the carabinieri and fling her out!"

"Hush, Ione! you must not say such things here," said Armine. "We are not used to this kind of thing in England."

"Then you will have to get used to it," said Ione, suddenly assuming that dangerous coldness of obstinate opposition characteristic of the bad and sad old days. "I shall say what I think, in England or anywhere else."

"For Heaven's sake hush, Ione!" reiterated Armine. "Mary may hear you."

"And what do I care if a common wretch like that hears me or no?" retorted Ione. "She is a bad, in-

solent, ugly old creature, and she does deserve a beating and to be flung out of the house."

"If this is the way in which you are going to treat English servants, you will find it will not answer," said Armine, with undeniable irritation.

"And you defend a common wretch like that against me, Armine!" cried Ione, with a sudden blaze of passion. "If I had not heard it with my own ears I would not have believed it. I can scarcely believe it now."

"Nonsense, Ione, I do not defend her. How can you excite yourself by such exaggeration?" he said.

"Do you mean that I tell lies, Armine?" she asked, as she might have asked the same question of Clarissa when things went cross between them.

And on this Armine went out of the room, presently returning with Mary at his heels and a coal-scuttle in her hand, having coaxed her as a woman to do her duty as a servant.

Thus it chanced that the first discomfort between these two young people, since their marriage, was brought about by the sordid circumstance of a servant's ill-temper, founded on the trifling fact that Ione had drawn her mantle a little closer round her shoulders. So true is it that the greatest events of life spring from the most insignificant causes, and that the deepest feelings may be routed, the most heroic actions nullified, by the meanest and most trivial accidents of life.

Mary had heard the whole of this conversation—or rather squabble—between the young people; and the first authentic account of the new bride, spread through Oakhurst, was that she was a heathen, a

Tartar, and a slave-driver, who offered to beat her, Mary, with her own hands, because she remarked meekly that the bright bars were in the parlour-grate—and should she make the young lady a fire somewhere else?

“A regular bad 'un!” said Mary to her audience; and her audience sucked in their lips and said: “Belike. How could it be else, seeing where she came from?”

Thus the story grew and grew, as all such stories do in country places, till, before the week was out, the game of Russian Scandal was repeated in such grave earnest that even Ione's worst enemies would not have recognized her in the caricature which prejudice and exaggeration had hammered out between them.

Story or not, no one was prepared to welcome these young people—no one was in the mind to receive Ione with kindness or to congratulate St. Claire with sincerity. All the fathers and mothers whose daughters had been secretly offered and tacitly rejected were angry with the young fellow who had not found his match at home but had had to go abroad for a wife. They took it as a moral offence, and were prepared to resent it as a personal affront. Miss Maria Crosby was perhaps the loudest in her denunciations of the wickedness which was assumed to lie in this marriage of her former fancy. She had thought better of him, she said with virtuous acrimony; but there! no one can say what any one will ever do; and when you take to any one, you are sure to be disappointed in them and to find them not worth a button. This was

her experience in life; and Dr. St. Claire was one who confirmed her belief.

Mrs. Anthony Barrington was also disgusted by the marriage. How could they patronize this most undesirable person, the new wife? While Dr. St. Claire was single, and they were not committed to some odious woman, it was all very well to be kind to him and all that; but how could they possibly receive her? She was sure to be some vulgar, underbred creature who would drop her h's and eat with her knife; and really it was a most awkward position for every one.

But when she said this to her husband, he answered a little shortly:—

“You should have thought of this contingency, Theo, before you brought the fellow so far out of his place as to ask him here to dinner. And for the matter of that, I dare say she is quite as good as he is, and will probably be more amusing. We men found him a dull dog enough, I can assure you; and what you women ever saw in him is one of the things I cannot for the life of me understand.”

“Well, I never saw anything!” laughed Theo. “Monica and mamma did, but I—never!”

On her side, Mrs. Barrington of the Dower House was doubtful both of the wisdom and propriety of the whole thing; seeing that Ione came from a foreign country, and might wish to Romanize the people here;—for which unfortunate proselytism, as the wife of the medical man, she would have only too many opportunities. Besides this, the practice of such a place as Oakhurst was not lucrative enough to support the wife and family of a man of Dr. St. Claire's pretensions. So that altogether she was doubtful and almost

distressed, and faintly hoped that things would come right in the end and turn out better than they looked now.

Monica's first feeling was one of acute disappointment; though she hated herself that it should be so, and though she assured herself twenty times a day that she was very glad Armine St. Claire was happy and had forgotten her. Nevertheless she was curiously pained for a person who had cause for thankfulness; but she was pained for him rather than for herself—for his character as an ideal rather than for any change in her own relations with him. She thought his nature had been different, and that he would have considered it a crime to marry a girl brought up in Sicily. Of course he had the right to judge for himself and to do what was best for his happiness; but she could not think that happiness would be secured by marrying a girl brought up in Sicily. She had no fault to find with Ione, of whom she knew nothing, while refusing to believe that first crude scandal which spread like wildfire through the place. She knew of her no more than others knew—and this was only what the announcement in the papers told them; how that Armine St. Claire, M.D., of Oakhurst, had married at the Consulate at Naples, Ione, the adopted daughter of Captain Ralph Stewart of Palermo, Sicily. And this was not much. Still, Sicily was such a long way off; and the marriage seemed to have been so strangely hurried and unexpected—so unlike anything that might have been looked for from him!

This was what she thought to herself—the extreme lengths to which her secret disapprobation went. Outwardly, and to others, she defended his action with

her own sweet gentleness of judgment and quiet firmness of advocacy—that kind of gentleness of firmness which never arouses opposition to advocacy, because so entirely free from all aggressiveness on its own side.

Edward Formby was the only one in the whole society who took an active part in upholding St. Claire. He went in for defence of the marriage with as much loyalty and enthusiasm as if he had had a personal hand in it, and it touched his honour somehow to prove it perfect. He spoke much of the irreproachable standing of Captain Stewart, which was in itself a strong backstay; and, man-like, he advocated the cause of the girl whose foreign appearance and undeniable beauty had been as much talked of as her wickedness. He thought that St. Claire was to be envied, not reviled, in that he had fished up a prize in the way of looks out of foreign waters; and he defended the young fellow with genuine warmth when Anthony growled and Mrs. Anthony laughed, and dear Mrs. Barrington mildly doubted and gravely feared, while Monica alone came to his side with that charity which hopes all things and thinks no evil.

“Men marry to please themselves, not their friends,” Edward said, with unintentional point; “and if a man loves a pretty girl, why should he not make her his wife? What the deuce else can he do? St. Claire has done quite right; the only drawback is that cursed question of finance, and whether they can pull through or not. Outside this there is nothing to be said against the marriage. And for the money-bags, that is their own affair.”

He spoke with almost personal warmth, as if it had been his own business that he was discussing.

"I think you are quite right, Edward," said Monica; but she did not look up when she spoke. She was occupied with the teaspoons. "It is, as you say, their own affair only; but if we choose we can make things better for them by our kindness to them; and I hope we will."

Mrs. Anthony looked at her sister-in-law sharply; then suddenly, flushing all over her face, she broke into a thin laugh and said:—

"What a queer creature you are, Monica!" speaking in that short staccato way she had when she was cross—a way like nothing so much as the dropping shot of small pistols.

To the discredit of Oakhurst, it must be said that those who went to church next Sunday went as full of the bride as of their devotions. This marriage was the great event of the moment, and by the exaggerated reports afloat concerning Ione it had been made of even more than natural importance. Even old Mr. Milwood, the bachelor rector—a good old soul who had no evil thoughts, though he had as keen an eye for female beauty as he had a discriminating taste for old port and brown sherry—even he peered over his spectacles when he rose from his knees after the initial prayer in the reading-desk, to scan his congregation as his manner was, but chiefly to find out the new-comer. And he said approvingly to himself: "Pretty dear! pretty dear!" as Ione came in with her husband, looking like a young queen entering on her kingdom—as superb in her consciousness of power, and as haughtily indifferent to the homage which nevertheless she claimed as her own, as was ever eastern empress with slaves for subjects.

That first Sunday! To Armine it was simply martyrdom with no crown to recompense him for the cross. He had resolved to bear his pain like a hero and to do his duty like a man. No one should see that he suffered—no one; not even Monica, to whom it would have been unspeakable relief to have cried out and told the whole sad story of his past weakness and present anguish. But he must hide it all; and let her believe, with the rest, that he had married of his own free will, in nowise compelled by circumstances; and that he was happy and exultant as a bridegroom should be.

He came in with his bride; showed her to her seat in the pew; arranged her footstool; paid her the few attentions possible to the time and place with almost ostentatious punctiliousness. And just across the aisle, parallel with them, sat Monica and her mother in the Barrington pew—just there where they could not help seeing them and taking cognizance of every look and movement.

Monica was deadly pale, but quite quiet and composed. This first trial over, she thought, all the rest would be easy; for she had schooled herself with severity and faithfully believed that she had learned her lesson. And, for herself, she was glad that the shock of first seeing Armine in his altered conditions had come to her at church. He, too, was as white as the handkerchief with which he so often wiped his upper lip; but outwardly he was as grave and composed as herself. He felt like a criminal, but he bore himself as if unconscious of evil. He was more miserable than he once could have imagined it possible to be, and yet live through the trial—more miserable

now than in the past, because self-degraded; but he had brought himself into this false position, and he must abide by the consequences of his own folly.

Wherefore, he ostentatiously paid Ione all those small attentions which were proper to the time and place, and forbore to look at Monica while he did so.

There was his Love—the woman whom nature seemed to have made for him—pure, gentle, sweet, refined, patient while she suffered, strong while she wept, able to renounce her own desire for higher things and to conquer even love for the sake of duty. And here was his wife, for whose very beauty he had only that kind of admiration which stirs the senses and leaves the heart untouched—with whose nature he had no spiritual sympathy, jealous, exacting, over-fond as it was—a woman whose love oppressed him by its tyrannies and fatigued him by its insistence—a woman who held him more than he held her, and who had taken him captive under the guise of surrendering to his will.

He glanced at Monica's tender face with its dreamy melancholy, its saintly stillness and resignation, not so beautiful as Ione's, judging by the beauty of the flesh only, but how far more lovely by the spirit!—and then he caught Ione's yellow-hazel eyes turned on him with that rapt look of passionate love which seemed to envelope him in flames; and he shivered suddenly as if a cold wind had blown over him.

Edward Formby was immensely struck by the beauty of the young bride. She seemed to him the loveliest creature he had ever seen—a woman to turn men's heads and make crowds go mad for her smile. Her eyes were like new-born worlds to him—revela-

tions of a new dispensation. They woke up something in him unfelt before. For such a woman he thought he could become an anchorite or a hero—live in torture or die in ecstasy. She was too good for St. Claire. Monica Barrington was of the type to have suited him better. Edward had always liked St. Claire, and had stood his friend in the place; but now he partly envied and partly despised him for the possession of a treasure of which he was certainly not worthy. Perhaps no man would have been fully worthy—but some would have come nearer the mark than Armine St. Claire.

Once, and once only, Monica looked across the aisle, first at Armine and then at Ione. Her eyes a little failed her and her heart seemed to stop still; but she turned to the hymn which she had no voice to sing, and tried to lose herself by closely following the words with her mind and repeating them in her heart. She did not look again, and her subsequent prayers were more fervent than usual; and they were never cold.

None of the Barringtons left the church quite so soon as usual to-day, and Armine took out Ione rather sooner than had been his wont—mingling with the crowd of the second set, and not waiting for the Upper Ten as in times past. Thus the two former friends did not meet—neither in the porch nor on the walk, nor yet under the lych-gate as of old; and both St. Claire and Monica felt that it was best. Each had borne as much as was wise for the first strain, even though the time and place had helped them. Across the aisle! The church and the law between them—religion and morality the twin sentinels set

against them; and only the invisible and indestructible tie of a spiritual love to bind them!

While the family strolled down the church-walk, Theodosia cried suddenly:—

“What an odd-looking creature that Mrs. St. Claire is! Don’t you think so, mamma?”

“She looks foreign,” said Mrs. Barrington cautiously.

Her failing vision had told her only this as a general impression, and had not supplied the details.

“She is splendid!” said Edward Formby, his cheeks flushed and his eyes glistening. “She is magnificent!”

“What do you think, Monica?” asked Theodosia, with a curious little laugh.

“I think with Edward, that she is wonderfully beautiful,” answered Monica, looking somewhat gratefully into the face of the man for whom the fitness of things and the lay of the land had destined her.

“Do you think you shall like her?” asked Theo, with another laugh.

“Yes, I am sure I shall,” returned Monica.

She had made up her mind. Of all in Oakhurst she would be the best friend of Armine St. Claire’s wife, and would stand by her with the most faithful support.

CHAPTER V.

THE OAKHURST BRIDE.

IONE was standing in her shabby drawing-room looking at herself in the glass. She was thinking of Armine more than of her own beauty; or rather she was looking at her beauty as at something that was Armine by the conversion of love—something that he had made his own and stamped forever with his impress. This was just the place where he had kissed her this morning before he had left her for his early rounds. She forgot to remember, as she had forgotten to remark at the time, that she herself, with hands clasped round his neck, had drawn his face down to hers, upturned to receive the caress claimed rather than returned. She only knew that just here he had kissed her; and, smiling that deep-hearted smile of happy love, she passed her hand caressingly over the spot as if she could still find the sweetness of his touch.

How happy she was! What a divine thing it was to love and be loved!—to make the beloved's whole life, and to be the owner and dispenser of his happiness!—to live in the light and warmth of a sun to which the material orb is but a dull and distant star!—to be the owner of a treasure to which the wealth of the world is but as dross! True. But if the rôles are inverted and the antiphony is falsely intoned?—if

the one gives who ought to yield and the other grants who ought to demand?—then confusion comes in the place of security, sorrow dispossesses joy, and the shame of disinheritance falls where should have been the crowned grace of loving womanhood.

Of all this Ione was as oblivious as she was of the fact that the little love-passage which she was recalling with so much exaltation of passion in her remembrance, had been claimed by her rather than proffered by him, and that in the living drama between them she gave and he received—she loved and he endured. Yet in the midst of all this exaltation she was vaguely conscious of a certain formless want for which she could not have found a name had she tried—that kind of dim consciousness which feels but does not apprehend.

While she was still standing there before the glass, a ring at the door-bell startled her from her reverie, and she heard a lady's voice asking if she were at home. In another moment the servant opened the door of the sitting-room and ushered in Miss Barrington—pale, quiet, heart-sick, but not terrified by what was before her.

This visit to Armine St. Claire's wife was an ordeal which Monica would willingly have avoided had she been able. But it had to be gone through, cost what it might; and she thought that the sooner it was undertaken the sooner its terrors would be over. Taking her mother's card, she drove into Oakhurst to pay this dreaded visit alone; thinking it safer to meet Armine and his wife without witnesses who might read in her face the shadows of thoughts she could not wholly banish, than to go with Theodosia, say, and subject

herself to dangerous diagnosis at the time and moral vivisection ever after. She had confidence in herself and her power of bearing pain without wincing. If those intrusive thoughts were not wholly banished they were held in strict subjection—if all human weakness was not destroyed it was reasoned down as rigorously as if she, who had loved and might never know, had been a nun whose clearest glimpse of the world had been on the day of her profession. She had made it clear to her intelligence that everything was better as it was; that Armine unmarried would have been sometimes a danger and always a pain; but married, and taken out of the category of possibilities, he was in a sense sacred—and pain would therefore be a sin. Yes, in the presence of his wife, she would lay her hand in his, hear his voice, look into his eyes, and banish from her for ever all regret, all disappointment, all remembrance of what had been, or, had fate been kinder, what might have been.

Yet, for all her calm, clear reasoning and brave decision, she was as pale as something dead or dying when she entered the room and stood there face to face with Armine's wife—the woman for whom he had dispossessed her in his heart and for whose love he had forgotten her own.

Pallor is not an accusing witness of much account, and even the unsleeping suspicion of Ione's jealousy found nothing disturbing in this new visitor's gentle face with its patient melancholy and dreamy abstraction, its beauty of expression rather than of feature or of colouring. She only thought her sweet and quite uninteresting—well-bred and by no means fascinating on the one side nor dangerous on the other. To her

she was just the Monica Barrington she was to every one else; good and sweet and gentle, but incapable of a heart-throb beyond that which is allowed by the strictest propriety—for fear say, or the vague wrongs of distant peoples—in no wise capable of a heart-throb for love of a man not socially her equal, and now the husband of another woman! And when Miss Barrington shook hands with the young bride kindly, welcomed her to Oakhurst frankly, and asked after her husband as if nothing lay behind her words and Armine St. Claire had never been the realization of her ideal, Ione neither saw the shadow nor heard the echo of the past whereby, unknown to herself, her whole presence was influenced; but received and returned Monica Barrington's greetings with no more distrust of hidden love than she had of future sorrow.

"You have been here too short a time to be able to say that you like Oakhurst," said Monica, after the first courtesies had been exchanged. "But I hope that you are not disappointed with it so far, and that you think it pretty?"

She said this with a curious mixture of advocacy and apology; fogland being so far behind that beautiful sunland whence this rare creature had come; but the brave old home having its own claims nevertheless.

"It is beautiful!" said Ione enthusiastically.

"Yet after your lovely Sicily our climate must seem very bad, and our sun very dim," said Monica.

"Have you ever been to Sicily?" asked Ione, a little sharply.

"No, never," said Monica.

"What has my husband been saying about it?"

she asked again. "Did he write to you, or have you seen him since he came home?"

"Neither," answered Monica, a look of surprise mingled with fear—what did Ione suspect?—for a moment troubling her mild eyes.

"I hate Sicily!" then said Ione, speaking with a certain mixture of passion and contempt—a certain accent of resentment that again startled Monica with the sense of secret pitfalls.

"I have always understood that it was so beautiful," she returned, not knowing what else to say.

"People pretend that they think so, but it is not," said Ione. "I should like you to be there when the scirocco blows! I never saw any beauty in it, and always wanted to be in England."

"And now you have your wish," said Monica.

"Yes!" said Ione, a smile coming like light into her face as her thoughts left the turbulent grief of the past and came back to the dear delight of the present.

"And are not disappointed:—that is nice," said Monica.

Ione touched the locket on her bosom. It contained one of Armine's raven curls.

"No," she said, with the same deep-hearted smile that had been on her face once before to-day. "I am too happy to be disappointed."

"I am glad," said Monica, in a low voice.

"My husband is so good! No one knows how good he is but me!" said Ione. Then she added proudly: "I like to think I am the only one who knows."

"He was liked here," said Monica with some difficulty.

"Oh, you could not love him as he deserves! You did not know him as I do!" returned Ione. "And he does not seem to have any real friends here," she added with her well-known resentful accent.

"I should have thought he had a great many," said Monica, playing nervously with the tassel of her parasol.

"When you let him get in such a frightful state of health!" was Ione's reproachful rejoinder.

"I hope he is better," said Monica.

The talk was very painful to her, and yet it seemed impossible to change the current of conversation.

"Oh, he is quite another thing! People are always well when they are happy," said Ione with a proud kind of laugh.

"He looks stronger," said Monica.

"When did you see him?" asked Ione with one of her sudden full-front stares.

"At church," replied Monica.

"Oh yes, of course!" said Ione. "You looked at him then; and you think he looks stronger? I am glad! Yes, indeed he is! You should have seen the wreck he was when he came to Palermo; but we took such good care of him from the first that we soon got him well. He is quite a giant now, compared to what he was! My poor dear, beautiful Armine! He always used to remind me of a saint, or something like that, when he was so thin and pale; but he never lost his beauty even when he was at the worst."

"He is very good-looking," said Monica mechanically.

She wished that Ione would not discuss her husband in this intimate manner. And indeed for one

so jealous it might seem strange that she should. But, coincident with this jealousy was her pride in her possession and a certain almost fierce desire to parade her power and prove to the world the arbitrariness of her holding.

"How dreadfully ill he was!" continued Ione. "You had almost killed him among you."

"He was sadly broken down before he left," said Monica.

"But you cannot imagine how soon he recovered in Palermo," Ione returned, still harping on that jarring string. "He seemed to get well directly after we knew him. And we saw so much of him that we could judge."

"You saw so much of him?" repeated Monica, almost like an echo.

"Yes, from the first," said Ione. "He took to us, and we to him, from the very first. It was all at first sight," she added, again that strange proud smile coming like so much physical light into her face.

Monica's tender mouth trembled for just a moment; yet she smiled too, despite that sensitive quiver, and looked into Ione's face as if sympathizing with her retrospect of blissful love.

"Those things always are," she said vaguely.

And Ione answered, "Yes; always," as if her words, like Monica's, were both explanatory and intelligible.

"I hope your father and mother will like your new home," then said Monica, as unsuspecting of a stab as Ione had been of torture.

The young bride's face changed.

"I do not expect them," she said haughtily.

"No? not yet? I hear from Edward Formby that

Captain Stewart is said to be a very charming man," said Monica, glad to make a diversion from Armine.

"Who is this Mr. Formby?" asked Ione, on her side glad to make a diversion from her adopted parents.

"Who is he?—Edward Formby of Hillside, a good, dear fellow—a great friend of my brother's and a good friend to every one. He is nothing else that I can say; just Edward Formby of Hillside," was Monica's not too lucid reply.

"He seems rather nice, and such a thorough Englishman!" said Ione with a little laugh. "It is not the kind we caricature in Italy; but he is such an Englishman of one kind!"

"Do you know him?" asked Monica, in her turn surprised.

This was only Tuesday. If Edward Formby had already called—the very day after that first public appearance at church—it was showing a zeal for the young couple almost beyond his promise—almost beyond what was necessary.

"Yes, he called here yesterday," said Ione. "And he likes my husband so much that of course I like him. But I did not know more about him than his name and where he lives. And you have told me no more. Armine has not talked to me of the people here. He says they are not interesting."

"I am afraid we are not very," said Monica, with a sad kind of patience.

She remembered when Theodosia had said the same thing. She had not believed her then. Somehow she did believe Ione. But what would have wounded her then, if true, seemed now the right thing to have been said.

"I made him tell me of one or two I noticed at church," continued Ione. You were one," shortly; "and that dark, sharp-faced, little woman, your sister-in-law I think—she was one. She is so like a pretty rat! But I had not noticed this Mr. Formby."

"It is difficult to understand all about a new place at first," said Monica, finding it difficult for her own part to realize that Armine had discussed her with his wife. "You will soon however grow into it, for the society here is not large. What a nice piece of ground you have for a garden!" she broke off suddenly, looking at the neglected tract which grew more weeds than flowers and more daisies and dandelions than the turf proper for an English lawn. "Do you like gardening, Mrs. St. Claire?" she added, to take the conversation away from people, bristling as it was there with difficulties, and throw it on innocuous things.

"I like flowers, but what should I know of gardening?" said Ione in a somewhat offended tone.

Did this pale-faced girl think she had been used to dig and weed and water like papa's barefooted workman?

"I am very fond of gardening," said Monica simply. "I like to see my own seeds come up, and the things that I have planted grow and blossom. I feel as if they were part of myself, when I have planted and taken care of them. Do not you?"

"I have never tried," said Ione coldly.

"No? what a pity! You have really lost a pleasure!" said Monica with a sweet smile, seeing the feeling behind the manner. "I have always had my own garden, ever since I was a child," she went on to say, thinking to calm this sensitive pride by the comparison.

"At the Manor, and now at the Dower House, I have my own domain where I may do as I like—grow my favourite flowers, and pick them as I choose, without the interference of that dreadful tyrant, Mawe," she added with another smile.

"Who is Mawe?" asked Ione, a little unpleasantly.

"Our head gardener," returned Monica; "who calls everything his and treats us as interlopers who have no business to interfere when we ask for flowers, or remonstrate with him about the fruit and vegetables."

"He is quite right," said Ione, still unpleasantly. "In Sicily we leave all things of this kind to men; and though we pick what we like, without leave of course, we do not do the work of servants ourselves."

"We do not call such light work as we can do, servants' work," said Monica very gently. "You see, English girls are so much more active in their habits than Continental ones. We live so much more out of doors, and use our strength more freely."

"Still, I should not like to do a man's work or to make myself a servant," said Ione, sticking to her text, and forgetting all that she had promised both herself and Armine before marriage. "And there are so few flowers here," she continued. "There is no bougainvillea, no datura, no acacia, nothing that we have in Sicily; and the roses are so poor, and the geranium bushes such poor little scrappy things! I do not look at that place out there as a garden at all. It is like the fields round the Favorita; and not half so pretty as these when the pheasant's-eyes are out."

"There will be more flowers as summer comes on," said Monica. "It is rather too early yet for full bloom."

But when your man has weeded your garden, it will look much better; and if he will come up to the Dower House I will tell Mawe to let him have some cuttings and bedding-out plants which will furnish it and make it gay."

"I am quite content with it now," said Ione proudly. "It is Armine's, and I prefer it as it is."

"As you will," said Monica, a spasm almost like faintness gripping at her heart.

After this the talk wandered over a few more subjects, to be always dragged round by Ione to Armine—ever Armine—the central point of her thoughts, the master-key of her interests. She was not in general a confidential or expansive person; but a very demon of girlish garrulity seemed to have possessed her to-day; and, after she had borne as much as she well could, Monica got up and drove away, leaning back in her carriage pale, weary, and with the feeling of having been bruised and beaten all over.

She had given her all to this man—her secret soul, her hidden love, her unspoken faith, her unavowed constancy, her whole power of idealization and belief in his matchless worth. And from the first moment of his seeing another he had forgotten her and loved that other! It was a heart-break; not for herself, to whom he had been ever impossible, but for him—in that he had proved himself so unworthy of her former secret reverence. Nevertheless she would stand his friend as heretofore; and she would be his young wife's defender. And as things were in Oakhurst she knew that she had her work cut out for her, and that her self-imposed task would not be light.

She was right. The pronounced difference in man-

ner and appearance, in tone of thought and rule of living, between Ione and the Oakhurst world, was set down in the score against the young wife as a sin which called for reprobation; and she had to suffer in general esteem because her hair was shorter and curlier than that of her neighbours; because her manner was stiller on the one hand if, on the other, she used certain little gestures to which English people are unaccustomed—as when she turned up her chin and struck her tongue against her teeth for a negative—shook her forefinger slowly before her face to enforce disapprobation or express earnestness—shrugged her shoulders for disdain, or said *Altro* for emphasis of assent; because her eyes were yellow-hazel in some light, green in others, and inexplicable always; because her nostrils were large, thin, transparent, and never still; because her face was not modelled after the ordinary English type, and her beauty, which was undeniable, was therefore odd and displeasing; because her speech was coloured with the faintest little accent of an indefinite kind—a certain caressing lingering on the letters, which Edward Formby thought the most charming thing in the world and every one else the most affected. All these differences were commented on and condemned whenever two or three were gathered together to discuss the new bride and formulate their causes of disapproval.

And they were always meeting and discussing and formulating. Nothing was talked of in the place but young Mrs. St. Claire and her queer household management; the hours at which she got up and those at which she went to bed; her dresses and her dinners; her ignorance of money and the questionable mistakes

she made in adding up, always taking the shilling at tenpence and thus getting into endless trouble with the tradespeople, whom she angered by her inability to understand their explanations. Her ignorance also, of how things ought to be done, and of how economies might be made, was another fruitful topic among the housewives. In fact, the mess that she made of it altogether, and the unsatisfactory nature of her whole individuality, were the standing texts for local discussion and the carpet which every one helped to brush. Oakhurst had not had such a dish of gossip for many a long day; and it is only doing Oakhurst justice to say that it made the best of its fare.

Meanwhile, the subject of all this uncharitable talk, safely chambered in the fool's paradise of her own creation, lived in those radiant dreams where we find so much happiness while they last, and before that inevitable dissipation into nothingness comes. She neither heard nor heeded the bitter voices following her feet. Was she not Armine's beloved? What then to her was all the word standing without the Golden Gate? Just what to you is the barking of the cur in the far distance—just that, and no more!

And as one expression of her content she intended to make herself English all through, and to be what she had promised—a help to Armine. She had even come to the humiliating grace, or servanthood, as she still thought it, and played at good housekeeping as the fine ladies of the French court once played at bucolic and shepherding. She put on a big apron and did a little dusting in the drawing-room; and she put on a pair of Armine's gloves and tried her hand at gardening. But she broke one or two things on the

chimney-piece, and she rooted out the seedling annuals in the borders; so that on the whole her activities were rather more damaging than profitable in the general account.

What was more to her taste, as well as more within the circle of her possibilities, was the Englishhood of long walks in the lanes and fields; whence she returned with a clear skin, the sense of blood set flowing freely through her veins, and her hands full of wild flowers, which made her look like some semi-divine Pagan nymph laden with the offerings of her worshippers.

And to be able to ramble about with more complete satisfaction in her nationality, she bought an expensive walking-costume to save her shabby gowns, and a pretty little jaunty "toque" to save her still shabbier hats.

She had to submit to a bad quarter of an hour when she told her husband what she had done, and called on him to admire and approve; while he, very kindly but quite plainly, told her that, although he admired beyond measure, he could not approve even in the least. She must make no more such purchases for the future, he said quietly; his slender finances would not bear even so small an extra strain as this.

"Am I never to have a new dress, Armine?" said Ione, her head erect. "Other girls marry with a trousseau; I had nothing. You cannot be so poor as not to be able to afford me a simple little costume like this!"

"Unfortunately I am, dear," he answered. "You should have everything you wished if I could afford it."

"Oh, you can!" she said positively. "And if you cannot I will save it out of the housekeeping."

"Yes?" said Armine, with a half-sad, half-incredulous smile; for that housekeeping was already a tangled bit of thorny ground between them.

The weekly bills were far in excess of the weekly earnings, but Ione professed herself unable to curtail them below their present average; and the theory that what keeps one will keep two was on all fours with that of her help in practical management, whereby she broke the chimney ornaments and rooted out the seedling annuals.

But in spite of this outbreak of extravagance in the matter of the walking-dress, and for all that her endeavours after notable servanthood were defective, Ione did faithfully desire to do her duty, and to be a help as well as a pleasure to Armine. How indeed should she not, loving him as she did, and when she herself—as she was so sure!—was the one sole-beloved of his past as the one sole-adored of his present.

The one sole-adored of his present; true; true as the life that throbs on the earth and shouts up to heaven in the sea—true as eternity—true as the divine. And yet, even to her, so certain as she was—and contented as certain—he sometimes seemed curiously pre-occupied, nay almost cold, for a man whose love was so passionate as, in her faith and fancy, was his. Had not her eyes been so full of the effulgence of her own passion she would have seen that she did not possess his. But she put down these moments of voiceless discomfort to the score of his regret that she was poorer than his love for her would have had her. And in this belief she not only forgave what at times looked almost like thinly veiled irritation, and at times was only somewhat frozen coldness, but even carried it to

the account of his love and paid interest on it by increased idolatry.

How madly she loved him, and with what reckless prodigality she showered that love for ever and for ever over him! If only she would become the wife and sink the mistress! thought Armine, when she proffered him those wild caresses which he had to return as best he might, though in truth he shrank from them as from the touch of hot iron. The imperiousness, too, lying underneath even her love, galled him. She treated him too much as her possession, and held him as a child holds a bird, which for very delight she half-throttles and wholly tortures. When, in the evening, she made him seat himself on a lower chair by her side, while she passed her arm round his neck and held his head against her heart, kissing his forehead, his eyes, his coal-black curls as if her lips would never be weary of their worship, her eyes adoring him as if he had been a delicate kind of Apollo whose godhead was unquestionable, though his health was decidedly not Olympian—though, of course, as he said to himself, he was grateful for her love, as indeed what man would not be?—he was yet conscious that he only longed to free himself from her and to shake off, if he could for ever, the caressing grasp of that burning, beautiful, but not delightful hand. His thoughts were with his patients, if he had self-control; if he had not, then they were with that inner self which stood between Monica and Sorrow—that mournful Triad which was his real life. In any case they were not with Ione save when she compelled him to speak to her—she speaking to him with that sweet passion in her voice which means even more than a

caress—that sweet passion which he could only answer back with an effort! When she kept him in the morning, as he was starting on his first rounds, while she intoned her unechoed psalm of love, it needed some forbearance not to unclasp her hands—not to put aside those strong, young, clinging arms—not to say to her with cruel wisdom that life is too prosaic for these perpetual wanderings into enchanted woods, and that he must go on his millhorse way to make bread for the day's needs. If only she would leave off this embarrassing worship, this unceasing devotion, and fall into the quietude of wifely companionship and domestic monotony! If only she would! It was so hard to pass a lifetime in feigning—never to have a moment's respite from these fervent demonstrations, which he could meet only by lies!—it was so maddening to receive so much and to give back nothing! The temporary enchantment of that fatal moment beneath the carruba-tree had long since past; the flush of a man's natural pride for a woman's almost unsought love—of gratitude for her coming to him as Ione had come—had also died away; and nothing now remained but the chill of the collapse and the bitterness of the truth.

Of all miserable husbands in England Armine St. Claire was at this time the most miserable; but, true to the gentle conscientiousness of his character, he did his best to hide his self-inflicted misery from the wife whose only fault towards him was the exuberance of her love, and to keep the golden gate of that fool's paradise fast closed. He had an uneasy kind of feeling that things were insecure in more directions than one, and a presentiment that the future would see a

whole brood of cockatrices hatched about their feet. Meanwhile he was considerate, self-restrained, patient, doing his best to forget the past and to keep his face turned bravely to the present—and the future. And as he was circumspect to prudery, and kept his eyes in leash and his tongue in check, Ione's unsleeping jealousy found no weak place on which to fasten; and thus far things were peaceful between them.

So there the two stood—Ione believing herself to be absolutely and supremely beloved by Armine, and showing him her own love as if there could be no mistake in the answer; and Armine doing his best to leave her that belief undisturbed—the one self-deceived and torturing, the other honourably deceiving and self-tortured.

Out of doors things looked rather doubtful. The second set were not sympathetic; and only Monica spoke of the Oakhurst bride with an admiring friendliness of tone which many heard with surprise, in view of that difference of position so patent, so pronounced, and which betrayed to no one the fact that a heart-throb had ever been between her and Armine. Only Theodosia suspected that beneath this smooth outside lay a hidden world of regrets; and that what looked so like the interest of personal indifference was in reality the policy of resignation. Her sharp little head full of its busy thoughts, she watched and waited. Her own *engouement* for St. Claire having passed, she was terribly bitter to him, as is the way with great ladies who have condescended and not been caught, beckoned and not been answered. She said he had shown bad taste and ingratitude in bringing home an Anglo-Sicilian wife. Why bad taste, why ingratitude, it

would have been hard for her to have explained. She was never good at close reasoning; and though she spoke ill of Armine as if she really had some foothold for her spring, she could never go to the root of things, nor reveal the true shape of the Causa causans. She only called him conceited and Ione detestable; and when Mrs. Barrington asked Why? she merely tossed up her small sharp chin, and answered shrilly, "Never mind why! He *is* conceited, mamma; and she *is* detestable;" and there let the matter lie.

She and Anthony held themselves aloof from the young people after the first formal leaving of cards. And they were induced to do this little act of courtesy only by the earnest advocacy of Edward Formby, the quiet pleading of Monica, and Mrs. Barrington's graver desire. Had it not been for this pressure from without they would have ignored the St. Claires' existence; and in the exalted social status of the Barrington family no one would have wondered at the omission.

Edward Formby stood with Monica and Mrs. Barrington; but Miss Maria Crosby joined hands with Mrs. Anthony, and found no more good in either husband or wife than the Jerusalemites found in the Nazarenes. She too held that Armine St. Claire had been strangely wanting in duty to the neighbourhood by this hasty marriage with a foreigner; and in consequence she withdrew her patronage and made shift to exist without that daily medical attendance which she had found so vitally necessary in times past. She had been so long under medical treatment, she said, when she spoke of this withdrawal, she was almost a doctor herself by now, and could get along quite as well without such a young and inexperienced man as

that St. Claire as with him. She had always thought him too young, she added plaintively; saying this even to Jane Winter.

But Jane, who never let things pass in silence when she thought they ought to be thrashed out in words, said sharply:—

“La, Maria, that does go beyond me! You who stood out that he was just a miracle and had not a fault to his name—that, young or not young, he was simply perfection—to go back on your word like this and pretend that you thought him this, that, and the other all along—no, that is what I cannot put up with! What do you say, Rachel?”

“I think Aunt Maria forgets,” said Rachel.

“Then your aunt Maria does not forget,” retorted the invalid. “And your aunt Maria knows quite as well as other people what she thinks and says. The young man was all very well at the first, but he got conceited and stuck up; and this wicked marriage just shows what he is made of.”

“La, Maria, why is it wicked?” asked Jane, with a wink to her friend Rachel.

“Because I did not take against him from the very first, as you all did,” continued Maria, not noticing the question; “because I gave him a chance to show himself, you make out that I am a turncoat. I am no more a turncoat than any one else; and so I tell you!” she added with an hysterical sob.

“La, Maria, how can you go off about such a trifle as this?” said Jane disdainfully. “I never did see such a crying girl as you are. Anything will set you off! What does it signify to any of us what the young

man and his wife are like? We do not live in their pockets!"

"Then don't reproach me with being a turncoat!" said Maria with tearful anger.

"Who did, I should like to know?" said Jane.

"Both of you!" said Maria.

Jane Winter and Rachel Major looked at each other, and Jane sniffed, while Rachel said mildly:—

"La, Aunt Maria, how you do go on to be sure!" And Aunt Maria, who had whimpered as the prelude, now wept as the finale, of this oft-enacted scene of familiar discord.

CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE.

It had to come. Put off for a time by this good chance and that, it yet was in the order of fated things that Armine and Monica should meet each other alone, when no third person was by to enforce reserve by the fear of self-betrayal and to make restraint the safeguard against detection. Each dreaded the meeting, and both tried to avoid it; but in spite of their endeavours it came upon them unawares, and in a manner which they were helpless to prevent.

The lodge-keeper, who was also the head gardener, at the Dower House—that tyrant Mawe, who called the garden his, and forbade the ladies to think it theirs—had rheumatic fever, and Dr. St. Claire was of course in attendance. He had been there once or twice without seeing any one from the House, when one day going at an unexpected hour he fell on Monica passing in at the gate just as he was leaving the Lodge. So now the thing had come upon them, and escape was impossible.

Blanched cheeks and ashen lips; his voice roughened and hers difficult to manage; their eyes not frankly meeting but glancing evasively—away into space, down on the ground, up to the sky, at the shoulder, the forehead, the throat—anywhere but into each other; the sense of shame and dishonour on his part—of dis-

appointment in her ideal, but of divine pity and tender forgiveness on hers; these were the signs and emotions of that first meeting, face to face, of those who had loved without hope, but with the unspoken promise of fidelity to that dream which could never be translated into living happiness.

Coming together as they did, they were obliged to speak so that Mrs. Mawe, standing there with the gate in her hand, should not see in them any shyness or reluctance which might set her thinking. It was painful and embarrassing enough; but when the woman, called querulously by her husband, had run into the lodge, and they were free from the control of her presence, some strange kind of strength seemed to come into Monica, so that she shook off her nervousness as she would have shaken off untimely sleep, and was once more natural, unaffected, and herself.

She had to be strong enough for both; for his agitation increased as hers passed; and the more power over herself she gained, the less he seemed able to command.

They had exchanged those trivialities about the weather which are the refuge of the conversationally stranded, when Monica suddenly said, as if touching the secret sore boldly;—

“I hope Mrs. St. Claire does not find the climate very bad here in England?”

Armine felt as if she had struck him in the face; but he answered as well as he was able—doing his best to appear as if his wife’s name in Monica’s mouth was a mere nothing:—

“She seems pleased with everything English—even with the climate.”

"Yet it must be so different from that of Sicily," said Monica.

She intended to talk of Ione till she had worn down all embarrassment and talked the subject into familiarity.

"Yes, it is," said Armine.

"The summer here is not much better than the winter there—is it not so?" continued Monica. "Your wife must feel this to be almost winter."

"It is a magnificent climate—almost perfect," said Armine.

"How you must have enjoyed it!" said Monica, with a rather forced accent of lightness and sympathetic pleasure. "But poor Mrs. St. Claire! She must feel the change."

"Novelty is always amusing," was the vague and safe reply.

"I hope it will not be only novelty with her," persisted Monica. "I hope she will be as happy as she is now, even when the first freshness has worn off and she has grown accustomed to everything."

"Yes," said Armine.

He could scarcely say less.

"She seems so delighted with everything, it is quite refreshing to see her!" continued Monica.

"She ought to be a little happy now—she was unhappy enough at her own home," said Armine hastily.

Loyal to Ione as he intended ever to be, he yet wished to make Monica understand how much pity had had to do with his marriage. Perhaps she would see that, if he dwelt on Ione's domestic misery at Palermo.

"I am sorry to hear that," she said. Then she looked into Armine's face, bravely, straightly, steadfastly. "But now all that has passed away," she said; "and I am very, very glad that both you and she are so happy!"

It was in his impulse to cry out against this congratulation—to say to her as she stood there, before him, so strenuously renouncing the past and denying the truth of things: "I am the most miserable wretch that lives. I love you, and I do not love her—and my heart is breaking for you and not gladdened by her." But honour to the woman whom he had married, respect for the woman whom he loved, and the manliness which accepts the consequences of one's own actions, let them be what they will, all held him back, and with an effort he said huskily, "Thank you;" no more. He accepted her sympathy with his happiness because of his union with Ione; and so let it pass as fact and sincerity.

It was the same kind of day, with its pale yellow sunlight and subdued colouring, as that on which they had met and parted, mutely confessed and dumbly renounced, in this garden less than a year ago—less than a year ago, counting by months and days, but what an eternity, judging by events and feelings! The outward circumstances of the place were the same now as then. The fountain still flung up its "loosening silver" in the sunlight, the flower-scents perfumed the air, the peacocks screamed on the walks; the dark yew-trees grew in their formal close-set alleys—all was the same to sight and hearing. The only things changed were themselves; his right of aspiration, hers

of denial—his right of despair, hers of dreams—and the fact of Ione in place of the ideal of love.

No words were needed to tell how vividly each remembered their last interview in the garden. It came like a picture before them, like an echo, like a reflection. But Monica felt that this picture must be defaced and a new tracing made over the old lines—the echo must be silenced once and for ever. There would be no living else, sacrilege to love and the past as it might be. But sacrilege to love is sometimes sacrifice to virtue; and so it was to-day.

“Will you come up the steps with me and see my mother?” said Monica, standing at the wicket-gate which led to the lowest terrace and the fountain facing the steps.

How gentle and yet how resolute she was! He hesitated for a second before he answered. Then he said:—

“Yes, I will go up with you and see Mrs. Barington;” he too as desirous as she, if less resolute, to destroy the past and establish the present firm and solid on the ruins.

“She will be glad to see you,” said Monica, turning into the terrace, backed by its close-clipped yews and brightened by its sparkling fountain.

They came to the steps and went up—each step representing a feeling on which they trod—a phrase in the living page of their unpublished love which both did their best to score out. When they came to that where their last interview had ended, he stopped for a moment. The agony which possessed him held his feet so that he could not move. He felt as if his life

were going from him, as if he must scorn his manhood and despise his honour, and burst into the passionate tears of a love-lorn and broken-hearted woman.

Monica, hearing the halt, turned to look at him; and thus they were in the same relative positions as before—she above and he below—he looking up at her and she gazing down at him. It was the old time repeated in the new; but only as a lifeless statue repeats the features of the dead beloved.

When Monica looked at him, she saw that his eyes were full of tears.

“To-morrow, when you come to see poor Mawe, you must bring Mrs. St. Claire with you,” she said steadily. “She has never seen our quaint old garden, and I shall be glad to show it to her. Will you bring your wife to see me to-morrow, Dr. St. Claire?”

Her words roused him as she intended they should. He shook off the weakness that had fallen on him, as she had shaken off hers, angry with himself in that he had so far failed in the presence of one whose respect was the only thing now left him.

“Thank you, yes, I will,” he said, with curiously sudden steadfastness.

“I want her to feel at home here, and that my mother and I are her friends,” said Monica.

“How good you are! How angelic!” said Armine, almost as if speaking to himself.

“Why?” asked Monica, with a smile that sought to appear playful, and that was so sad instead. “Because I want you to bring your wife here to see us as often as possible, and because I want to know her better? Any one would wish that, I should think—

such a beautiful creature as she is!" she added with forced lightness.

"I am glad that you feel you shall like her," said Armine.

"And I hope that she will like us and feel that we are her friends, both my mother and myself," returned Monica.

"She will need friends, poor girl!" said Armine sadly. "The whole thing is so misfitting!"

"You must not think of that," replied Monica hurriedly. "Oakhurst is not worthy of her, I know, but your friends must rally round you and make her happy. She must not feel that anything is misfitting, except the climate—and that we cannot help!" she added with a smile that strove hard to be playful and was as sad as her former had been.

"It has all been——"

"A little sudden, but quite intelligible, when one has once seen her," interrupted Monica. "And just because it was so sudden and so intelligible, we must do our best to make her feel that she has come among friends, and to a true home."

"Your goodness is more than I deserve," said Armine, his face convulsed with pain. "I who must seem to you so worthless!"

In spite of herself the tears gathered into Monica's eyes, but she brushed them away under cover of putting back her hair. Then she turned her face steadily to the man in whom she had believed—the man whom she had loved as devotees love their saint, worshippers their god—the man of whose hastily married young wife she was speaking as one might have spoken of a sister.

"Why do you say that?" she said. "Your affairs are your own, not ours. If it pleased you to marry rather more suddenly than is usual, that is your own matter only, and we have no right even to criticise. It is morbid to call yourself worthless for that, Dr. St. Claire. And that is the only fact in your marriage with which any one could find fault—the only," she repeated. But though she tried, she could not look at him when she said this.

Pride, prudence, virtue, all dictated those few words as if they had been a material barrier raised between her and the man she had loved; but nature and truth were stronger than these others, and—she could not look at him while she spoke.

"I understand," said Armine in a low voice. "You are right."

It was almost five o'clock, and tea was on the well-known tea-table, in just the same place and with just the same arrangements and conditions as used to be in the days that were gone—never to return. Mrs. Barrington, in her old place, received her former protégé with her own sweet courtesy; but yet with a certain coldness instead of what had once been almost maternal kindness. His marriage had distressed and annoyed her. It was so selfish, so unwise! In his state of health, and with only such an income as could be got out of the Oakhurst practice, to marry this beautiful young woman, who might have done so much better, was, she thought, the very acme of manly selfishness. It was the way in which the world judges, and the conclusions to which it comes when it reasons on appearances only without knowledge of facts.

"I hope Mrs. St. Claire is well?" she said to her former favourite a little, very little, frostily.

"Yes; quite; thank you," he answered.

"And happy in her new conditions?"

"Yes," he said again.

"I am glad of that. It shows that she is adaptable," said Mrs. Barrington kindly. "What a remarkably pretty person she is! Pretty is scarcely the word," she added, correcting herself. "Handsome I should rather have said."

"You admire her? I am glad," said Armine.

"And you admire her too, I suppose," said Mrs. Barrington with a smile, meaning to be playful and pleasant.

He forced himself to smile too, in sympathy with her humour.

"Yes, I admire her," he answered, speaking as lightly as he could.

"Has she brothers and sisters?" asked Mrs. Barrington, who wanted to hear all about the young bride, of whom no one in the place knew more than the name.

"No; she has no brothers at all, only an adopted sister," answered Armine.

"I suppose her parents will be coming over to see her in her new home?" she asked again.

"I scarcely think so," was his reply.

"No? Well, it is a long way from Palermo!" she said.

"Yes, a very long way," he answered. Then, remembering that Mrs. Barrington must some day learn the truth, he thought it better to confess what he might in honour, and put an end so far as he could

to a misapprehension which hurt him and did no one any good. "The fact is," he said, with a certain hesitation that seemed to conceal as much as it told, "my poor wife has neither father nor mother, nor any blood relations at all. She was only the adopted daughter of Captain Stewart, and neither she nor I know more of her family than this—which you see is substantially nothing."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Barrington, a little shocked and scandalized.

She had thought St. Claire selfish in marrying Ione, when his marriage seemed to have prevented the girl's better chances; now she thought it wrong to himself to have taken a young woman without name or family—a waif and stray thrown by the tide no one knew whence nor how—a creature born of the darkness and existing only by a kind of reflected light. It was scarcely what was due to them. They had deserved more consideration at his hands than this introduction among them of a nameless and therefore doubtful young person, who might—who knows?—be one of those miserable beings who are antenaturally tainted by their parents' dishonour.

"I know what you think," then said Armine, watching her. "It was a foolish marriage for both of us. I acknowledge it. You cannot feel it more than I do; but, believe me, it was one of those things for which no one is responsible. It is too long a story to go into now, but I am sure you will believe me when I say that I was less foolish, less blameable, than you might imagine. Spare me the details, but trust my assurance. You will, will you not?"

He went over to her and took her hand in both

of his, in the old caressing and yet respectful way which had been his charm in times past. His pale face and earnest eyes pleaded with her for belief and generous judgment. He cared little enough for what others might think, but Mrs. Barrington's trust in him, her sympathy with him, her condonation—hers, and therefore Monica's—were as dear to him as life itself. In one sense indeed they were his very life.

“Yes, I will believe you,” said Mrs. Barrington after a pause, and somewhat with the feeling of lowering her guard. “The marriage, as it stands, looks worse than foolish, but I will credit you with good intentions—or at least with no unworthy ones. And after all”—here she pressed his hand and smiled—“it is not my business to interfere in your affairs.”

“It is the business of a friend to be satisfied that nothing has been done to forfeit esteem,” said Armine.

“I am sure you have done nothing to forfeit mine,” said Mrs. Barrington kindly.

“Thank you. That is all I ask,” he returned. “Believe only that I was overtaken by circumstances which did not leave me a free agent, and that I was not so mad as I seem to have been.”

He turned to Monica as he said this, and their eyes met. He had spoken for her as much as for her mother, and she had understood him. Now she knew so much of the truth as he wished her to know. It had not been the vulgar levity of a shallow nature which had warped him from the higher law of barren honour and fruitless faith. There was some mystery underneath, which she could not fathom, but which, if known, would exonerate him. In spite of Ione's naïve confession she knew that this love at first sight was a

myth, and that there had been no wilful departure from that unspoken troth which had not made herself and Armine lovers but which yet had left them bound. She was glad for the sake of that ideal which is the dearest part of the beloved. It was not the mere flesh and blood, the mere grace and beauty of Armine, that she had loved; but that loveliness of the soul, that brightness and beauty of the divine nature, which had been the very life of his humanity to her. This obscured, her love must needs die out in weeping for the lost; but while she could respect and believe in him, she held the essential part—and the rest might go.

Yet how sorry she was for him, and even more sorry for Ione! If that marriage had been made by circumstances and not by choice, some day the poor young wife would have to suffer—some day the veil would drop and she would learn the truth which was evidently hidden from her now. One side of that truth, however, she must never learn; and for her own part Monica resolved more firmly than ever that she would make herself Ione's friend and do her best for her in Oakhurst all through.

"You are very good to have confided so much to my mother," she said in her gentle way to St. Claire. "We shall hold it sacred to ourselves, of course."

"I know that I may trust you," said St. Claire, scarcely able to speak at all.

"Now let us forget all this and turn to something—I will not say less painful, but less embarrassing," said Mrs. Barrington. "Will you sing to me, Dr. St. Claire? I have heard no music like yours since you left. Sing one of those dear little songs I used to like so much. It will be like old times!"

She asked this as a token of her forgiveness and his rehabilitation; as a sign that his old place of favourite was still warm and open to him, and that the future was to be as the past had been.

He would rather she had asked him to do himself some grave personal injury.

"I am out of voice and out of practice," he said, turning pale.

But Mrs. Barrington's dim vision failed to note his change of colour, and his voice did not betray all the reluctance that he felt.

"I will forgive your want of voice," she said, smiling very sweetly. "It is good enough to be able to lose something and yet retain more than others have."

"You are very good," he answered; but he did not move.

"I think the piano is in tune," said Monica, going to it and striking a few chords as she stood over the keys.

He obeyed the request conveyed in the action and sat down in the old place, where he had so often sung his love to Monica and breathed in hers as the echo. Now he had only a threnody to give, and a requiem to receive.

After a few preliminary notes he sang, to a new arrangement, Shelley's mournful poem, "When the lamp is shattered," and with difficulty finished it creditably and without a self-confessed breakdown. Monica too had need of all her philosophy; but the horror that lies in a good girl's heart at the thought of conscious love for another woman's husband helped her so far that she was able to say with quiet composure: "What a pretty arrangement! Whose is it?" as if the

mechanical run of the notes and how the sharps and flats fell had been of more account than the feeling and the words.

"It is my own," he said, rising from the piano.

"How very pretty it is!—how very sweet!" said Mrs. Barrington. "Where did you compose it?"

"At Palermo," he said, not looking at Monica.

"And after you knew and loved your pretty wife you should have taken that other—that Indian song—and have put to music the 'spirit in your feet' which led you to her window," said Monica in a rather hurried manner.

"Yes," he said, accepting the reproof. "I ought, but I did not."

"It would please her if you did," said Monica steadily.

"I am afraid I have no time now," answered St. Claire, pained in spite of himself and his better reason.

But after all she was right. What was his duty now but to please Ione? She was his wife; he had undertaken obligations towards her; and Monica was but a shadow and a dream—nothing more substantial than a photograph nor more tangible than a rainbow! Yes, she was right. He had lost the right to love her, but he still retained that of desiring her respect, her trust, her confidence. He would prove himself worthy to possess the sole treasures left him. He would devote himself to ensuring Ione's happiness. That was the only thing for an honest man to do. The duty was clear enough to his perceptions: a duty constructed solid and four-square by his intellect. Nevertheless

the means seemed to him doubtful, oppressed as he was by his wife's wild love and broken-hearted for want of Monica's—unable to return the one and forbidden all hope of the other—like a man dying for fresh air to whom is given the stifling heat of a stove-house instead.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WOOD.

THE jaunty little toque and fashionable walking-costume had not been bought for the mere pleasure of keeping them locked up in the wardrobe. Determined to be English all through, Ione, as has been said, indolent in Palermo, was energetic at Oakhurst and spent much of her time in taking long walks in the country—always on the road where she thought she might meet her husband, and perhaps induce him to leave his trap and return with her on foot.

She had no fear of these long lonely walks. England was not like Sicily, she thought. There were no brigands to carry one off into the mountains till a ruinous ransom was forthcoming; the roads were safe and the liberties of women respected. The freedom for which she had longed all her life she might therefore profit by now when she had the chance. And she did; to her heart's desire.

One day she went out as usual. This time she did not take the highway. Armine had gone to Moss Farm, about six miles off by the London road, but only three by the fields and through the wood, where a man could ride but not drive. And she thought that, if she went by the shorter way, she should find her beloved at the other end, when she would make him walk back with her through those lovely meadows, that

fragrant wood. He was always so good—he did all she asked him to do! As indeed was but his duty, was her next thought; pride traversing her love as a line of steel might pass through a silken web. It was her right to receive all where she had given all—her right to be obeyed where command included claim and obedience was translated gratitude. She had sacrificed everything for him and his love; it was only just, then, that he should sacrifice his will when it ran counter to hers, and return in as full measure as she had bestowed.

She loved him. Yes; that was beyond question. All the same, she knew her rights and held by them.

Beautiful always, Ione looked supremely lovely to-day. Her spell of mental rest and happiness in her paradise—what mattered it if a fool's or no?—had told on her as sleep tells on the weary and worn-out.

Her moral wrinkles were smoothed out and her former chronically discontented look was lost in one of perfected felicity. Her nervous irritability of temper was in abeyance, and her manner was less watchful for causes of offence than of old. She was rounder, softer, sweeter altogether; perhaps less exciting because less complex in mood; more satisfactory and less inexplicable; but with always more than enough of that hidden fire, that mysterious attraction, which makes men mad for other women than Helen, than Cleopatra, than Circe. There was always that reserve fund of nameless possibilities in her which excites some and wearies others. No one ever felt to have thoroughly plumbed and sounded her; no one ever felt to have mastered and subdued her; and she was al-

ways herself and uninfluenced by the will of others. Even Armine was conscious that she gave voluntary service for the pleasure of love, rather than submission for the grace of duty. She was complaisant because she was strong, not because she was humble; and when she appeared to be most devoted, it was then that she was most self-assertive. As now, when she took these long lone country walks that she might meet her husband at the end and make him go back with her on foot, no matter what were his professional duties nor what was his personal reluctance—the action which looked so like womanly devotion was in fact the arbitrariness of self-will. There is a world of difference between the love which pleases itself in loving, and the love which seeks the pleasure of the beloved.

Ione was walking through the wood, delighting in the balmy freshness of the day, and mentally contrasting this delicious air with the scorching heat of Palermo at this same hour and time, when she came to one of those natural seats made by the forking stems of two beech-trees, with which we are all familiar. How lovely it was, with its golden-green cushions of moss, where the fronds of the polypody and the maidenhair spleenwort stood up like knightly plumes, and the tender little leaflets of the wild wood-sorrel were like smooth silken rosettes set against knotted velvet! How beautiful it all was, and how peaceful! She was just a little tired—she must rest there for a moment before going on. She had time; and she should not miss her darling.

She sat down on this cushioned seat, dreaming of Armine and linking memory to love. She thought of

that moment under the carruba-tree when he bent forward and kissed the back of her neck—there where the golden sun had touched the golden curl. She remembered the rush of joy that had struck through her like an electric shock—how every nerve and fibre had quivered with ecstasy at knowing herself beloved—she who had loved him without his prayer and beside her own hope, now feeling herself clasped in his arms and held strained to his heart! She remembered his eyes when she had looked into them, how they seemed to be verily divine, and how his beauty had put on an almost supernatural glory—how at that moment she seemed to have passed away from the ordinary life of man and to have come into the place where she had found God; and her heart beat with strong, quick, full pulsations as she pictured it all so vividly as to make her feel that she was living through the moment once more. Then her thoughts wandered onward; and, memory conjuring up the sweetest moments by the way, she stopped at last at the present time and the immediate future of to-day.

She would bring Armine back with her through the wood, and they would sit here for a while—in England under the beech-tree as a replica of the time when they had sat in Palermo under the carruba. She made out all the circumstances of this little idyllic love-scene to herself;—how she would put her arms round him, and he would put his round her;—how she would lay her head on his shoulder, her face upturned so that her lips should almost touch his cheek—almost, not quite, like a promise not yet claimed—a sweet warm challenge to be perforce accepted. And then she seemed to feel the fragrance of his lips on

hers—those dear kisses which he always gave when asked. She forgot, poor Ione! to remember that they were never given unless asked for. She would draw his head down on her lap and pass her hand among his curls. And he would let her have her will of him and love him as much as she would. All the same, to have her will of him in all things was her right.

She was half asleep with the heat and the delicious dream conjured up like an acted drama before her, when an unkempt, ragged, brutal-looking man came slouching past, and, stopping in front of her, asked for alms in a tone that was more a menace than a supplication.

Ione was one of those women whose courage comes from temper. Before her pride was touched she was timid and afraid. Her blood curdled round her heart as this rude, rough man, standing in an insolent attitude before her, demanding alms in a menacing voice, and with something in his face that was half a leer and half a threat, made her suddenly feel her helplessness and his power, her loneliness and his audacity. Yet this was England; and there are no brigands in England!

“Vatene via!” she said, startled into the familiar phrase.

Her foreign tongue emboldened the man yet more. It gave him the impression of isolation—that she did not belong to them anyhow, and that the law, which might have protected or avenged a native-born Englishwoman, would not take cognisance of a stranger.

“I don’t understand yer, mum,” he said insolently, advancing a step nearer.

"Go away!" cried Ione, in the shrill high-pitched voice of fear.

"Ye'll please to give me something afore I do," he returned.

"You are insolent. I have nothing," she said.

"You have some pretty shiners there," said the man, rudely touching the locket on her throat.

Ione sprang to her feet, and struck the man's face with the back of her hand.

"Insolent! how dare you!" she exclaimed, her blood now up.

He caught her by her two arms and forced her backward, pinioning her in his strong grasp and pressing her against the bole of the tree.

"You'll excuse me, mum, but you'll please to give them to me," he said coarsely. "I want them a sight more nor you."

As he spoke he loosened one of her arms, and with his disengaged hand tore the locket from the chain. It was that in which she had placed Armine's hair.

Ione gave one piercing shriek, and, as if in answer to her cry, she heard the sound of a horse's hoofs coming through the wood towards her—there where she stood pressed back against the tree, and her locket, in which part of the very substance of Armine's dear body was enshrined, in this ruffian's grasp. The man heard it too, and, like some beast of prey startled in his pursuit, he suddenly released her; and with one bound was off and away into the wood, where, crouching down among the bracken and the undergrowth, he was lost to sight and hearing.

Then Edward Formby rode up, and Ione was safe.

When he saw her standing there, pale with fear, trembling with passion, her large eyes dark and flashing, her nostrils quivering and dilated, he drew rein and threw himself from his horse. Was hers the cry that he had heard?

"Good God!" he said impulsively; "what are you doing here alone? What has happened, Mrs. St. Claire? You are trembling; you are terrified—what is it?"

"A brigand!" said Ione, looking round into the wood. "He is there now. But he cannot hurt us; he had no gun."

"Some scoundrel has frightened you, I can see. But a brigand?" said Edward.

"Yes," answered Ione. "And I never thought of such a thing! I thought you had no brigands in England; but this wretch robbed me of my locket. It is desecration!" she added fiercely, remembering what sacred treasure that small gold case held.

"The scoundrel! He was some rascally tramp, and they are as bad as brigands," said Edward, in more agitation than was usual with him. "But what are you doing here alone? Where has that scoundrel gone? St. Claire should not let you wander about like this by yourself! It is not safe," he added in a hurried and disjointed way, as if he spoke all in one breath.

"England is safe," said Ione a little proudly.

"No, no! not to the extent of allowing ladies to take long country walks alone," he repeated. "We have no organised bands of brigands as you have in Sicily, but we have wandering tramps who are just as dangerous when they get the chance. What did this man do to you?"

"He wanted me to give him money; and I had none if I would, and I would not if I had had it," said Ione. "Then he took hold of my arms—the wretch!" she added, brushing her sleeves with her handkerchief as if to brush off some pollution from her person; "and then"—and here her voice deepened and roughened out of all likeness to its ordinary tones—"he tore my locket from my neck."

"The villain! the scoundrel!" cried Edward, furious and agitated. "Which way did he go? Up there?"

He hitched the bridle of his horse to a bough, and turned to follow the trace of the man made by the broken brushwood and trampled bracken; but Ione caught his arm. The horse, which was a spirited chestnut, was plunging violently; and she was afraid both of the beast's heels and to be left alone with the possibility of the hidden brigand making a descent on her, or perhaps of assassinating Mr. Formby.

"Don't go," she said, with a curious mixture of command and entreaty. "I don't want you to go."

"But that scoundrel!" pleaded Edward, whose fighting blood was up.

"Oh, let him alone! he is in the wood somewhere. He had no gun, but he might have a revolver. You are better here with me. And I do not like your horse."

"I will not leave you if you would rather not," said Edward reluctantly.

He was sorry to give up the chase and the instant chastisement with his own hands which would have been so soothing to his superior manhood; but he promised himself that the ruffian should be watched for, and, when caught, trounced as a magistrate can always

trounce a vagrant when he will. Meanwhile, perhaps it was his duty to remain with Mrs. St. Claire. She looked pale; she had asked him to stay; and the chestnut might do himself some harm.

"My dear Mrs. St. Claire, be advised by me and warned by this disagreeable adventure," he said, after he had soothed his horse; thinking that, if he could not beat that brutal assailant of St. Claire's beautiful young wife into a jelly, as he deserved, he would utilise the time by profitable sermonising. "Do not take these long country walks alone! You must not! Indeed you must not! They are not safe. Where on earth were you going? What were you doing here by yourself?"

"I was going to Moss Farm to meet my husband," said Ione. "And why should I not come here? I have been all through the wood before."

"Then your husband should not allow it," said Edward Formby, dropping his stone into deeper waters than he knew of.

"My husband does not allow me to do anything. I am my own mistress. I am free to do as I like," said Ione haughtily.

"To be free to run into dangers of which you can know nothing is but a poor kind of liberty," said Edward manfully. "My idea of a husband's duty is that he should protect his wife—take care of her and look after her."

"And how can my husband protect and look after me as you call it—as if I were a little dog—when he is obliged to go to those horrid patients of his—when he is obliged to be hours away and miles off?" cried Ione with flashing eyes, up in arms for the integrity of

her beloved as well as in defence of her own freedom, and glad to be able to lash out against circumstances which annoyed her in proportion to their inevitability.

"Of course. He has his profession; I forgot. That makes a difference," said Edward, in an odd staccato manner. "All the same, it is not safe for you to go so far away from houses, and to wander into these lonely places by yourself. You see what has happened to you to-day; and you can never be sure that the same thing may not happen again."

"Then I might as well be back in Palermo!" said Ione contemptuously, and as if her companion were responsible for the whole thing. "And I would rather trust myself to English tramps than to Sicilian carabinieri!" she added passionately—so passionately that the good fellow who had undertaken her enlightenment was suddenly himself enlightened so far as to know that he was stumbling over ploughshares and floundering in quicksands.

"At all events I must keep with you now," he said, shifting his point. "You have been frightened and your nerves are shaken——"

"They are not shaken the least in the world," interrupted Ione.

"And you feel brave enough to go on alone, with the man in hiding in the wood?" asked Edward in frank amazement.

What an enigma she was! White with terror and just escaped from a very real danger, with her words of request for protection yet warm on her lips, and now in a moment as proud and defiant as if that which had happened to her were mere child's play!

Ione had no intention of coquetry. She was too

ardently in love with Armine for that; for though love cooled down to friendship easily admits of a new passion, love at the boiling-point fills heaven and earth and time and space with its own fumes, and leaves no room for aught beside. Still her look and gesture were perilously like coquetry as she turned her glorious eyes to her companion, and said in the sweetest manner of sudden self-surrender: "You are very good! Thank you. Yes, do come with me to Moss Farm, where I shall find my husband."

Though she had so warmly defended her beloved against Edward's vague charge of neglect, yet she was not sorry that this last should accompany her as her protector against dangers which Armine had allowed her to run. She felt dimly and indistinctly that a little jealousy would be a wholesome condiment and useful spur. All men are the better for a little spur, and condiments are good in daily food. Even dearly beloved Armine might be wakened up to advantage.

"I was half asleep when that brigand came up to me," she said, as they set their faces to the west, and walked on the way that led to Moss Farm.

"And that was imprudent," said Edward, with a curiously strong desire to protect and inform this beautiful young wife of the man he called his friend.

"Why, you are worse than we are in Palermo!" cried Ione, with a little laugh, not unpleasant.

"Are you so bad there?" he asked, smiling.

"In some things," she answered.

"You may not walk in the woods alone? or go to sleep under the trees in the middle of the day?" he said lightly.

"Walk in the Favorita alone? I or Clarissa? Dio

mio, no!" she returned. "All the world would have been in a ferment if we had, and every one we knew would have called to beseech papa and mamma to put a stop to such iniquity. But then, no Palermitan lady walks alone at any time, and very few walk at all."

"And you?—did you rebel or conform?" asked Edward.

"We were obliged to conform. We were brought up half like Sicilians, Clarissa and I; and we were allowed very little more liberty than they. That made me long so much to come to England. I always felt as if I were in a prison at the Villa Clarissa. I longed so to be free!"

"Ah, you like liberty, I see; perhaps a little too much," said Edward.

"How can an English girl like it too much?" she answered. "It is that which makes us so much better than any one else."

To which Edward Formby answered, "Yes, it does;" both a little wide of the real meaning of the other. For Ione by no means held English girls so far superior to others; and Edward, who considered them the pink of creation, had just protested against their normal liberties. Like many men of his kind, his feeling for the women whom he did respect was one of almost exaggerated chivalry, almost excessive protection. Even to those whom he did not respect he was kind and considerate; for to be a woman was, to Edward Formby, to be entitled to all men's care and his own especial regard.

"I should have thought your father would have brought you up rather in the English than the Italian

way," he said, continuing the conversation as they walked along the wood-path. "He was such a thorough Englishman in his time! As long as I can remember I have heard him spoken of as a kind of oracle for all manly sports, and I should have expected he would have carried the English flag all through."

"You cannot in Sicily. People would say all sorts of things," said Ione.

"Have you heard from them lately? Will you remember me kindly to him when you next write?" said Edward.

"I have not heard from them lately; and I am not going to write," said Ione, suddenly stiff and glacial.

"Did you know your aunt Helen?" asked Edward, not conscious of offence.

"No," she said.

"She was so beautiful! I remember her when I was a boy about ten years old. She must have been about nineteen or twenty then. She was so lovely! and you are something like her. I cannot say where or how, but you certainly remind me of her, vaguely, oddly, but unmistakably."

"What nonsense!" said Ione abruptly.

"Why nonsense, Mrs. St. Claire?" he asked in surprise. "Why should you not resemble your aunt?"

"Because she was not my aunt; because she was no relation to me at all," said Ione; "because I am not papa's daughter nor mamma's — only something adopted, no one knows why or from where."

"Surely not!" said Edward, pained by her manner and shocked by her information.

"And since I am confessing to you, I might as well tell the whole truth. It will save trouble," said Ione,

in the same cynical and hard way as before. "They did not want me to marry Armine, because he was poor; and they are very angry with me. So they do not write; and I shall never see them again."

"I am very sorry," said Edward after a pause. "And I do not think St. Claire should have married in such a case as this."

"Do not blame my husband!" said Ione, her eyes ablaze. "He is perfect! I will not hear a word against him! never! never!"

"Well, I will not blame him, dear Mrs. St. Claire," returned her companion in a soothing, apologetic way. "You are quite right—you are noble and true and womanly."

"Thank you," said Ione with sudden softness.

By this time they had come to the end of the wood and the gate of Moss Farm; but there was no trap, no sign of Armine; and, when Edward Formby went in to inquire, he was told that the doctor had been and gone again this good half-hour or more. So there was nothing for it but to walk back through the wood, with Edward Formby instead of Armine as her companion, along that fragrant glade and through that enchanted ground.

Ione could have wept for disappointment in her hope, and have blazed heaven-high in rage at being obliged to accept Edward's protection at all. Since she could not have her husband's, she did not want *his*! She was very cross and almost as disagreeable as the Ione of Palermitan days; but Edward was a good dear obtuse kind of fellow, without suspicion and free from irritability, and bore his beautiful companion's snubs with unruffled good-humour, thinking

it only natural that she should be put out—and that Armine ought to have foreseen the whole affair and have waited for her till she came. And then he sighed. He did not know why. Perhaps it was because life looked a little dreary to him in that he had no large-eyed wife to be unpleasant to other fellows because disappointed of his own society.

When they passed the tree where Ione had conjured up her loving vision, and where, instead of a caress from her husband, she had been insulted by a ruffian, she found the place occupied by a ragged woman and a still more ragged child, the former of whom got up as the two drew near, and held out in her grimy hand Ione's ravished locket.

"Please 'm, I found this hard by. It don't belong to me; maybe it belongs to you?" she said, with that naturalness of manner which practice in deceit and acting makes perfect in beggars.

"It is mine!" cried Ione, snatching the locket from the dirty hand that held it. "And now you have spoilt it for ever by your vile touch!" she added. And as she spoke she flung the trinket to the ground and set her heel on it till she had ground it into a shapeless mass of broken gold and splintered glass, and matted mud-besmeared threads of hair.

"It was polluted!" she said, her eyes like wells of living fire. "You wretch! you wretch! how dare you touch it! And how dare you sit there in that place? — Mr. Formby, strike her with your whip and send her off!"

But Edward did not take up those cudgels in Ione's behalf and order the woman to move. That mossy seat between the forked stems of the beech-

trees was public property, and even a beggar has public rights. He did, however, scare the woman by his magisterial severity of speech, threatening the vague terrors of the law, and telling her that both she and her husband, the brute who had just now frightened the lady—oh! he knew him well enough!—should smart for it as they little expected. But Ione was, in her heart, indignant against him in that he had not avenged her sentimental outrage about the seat; and in token thereof she made herself more and more like a branch of thorns all the way home.

As they were crossing the meadow they came on Miss Jane Wintergreen and Rachel Major taking a constitutional, as they often did together. The ladies bowed—Rachel's plain good face the colour of a dark-red dahlia; Jane's rather more jaundiced than usual. Edward raised his hat. Ione stared without bowing, and smiled insolently. She was of the kind whom personal sorrow makes bitter and inhuman; and just now her sorrow for the loss of her much-prized locket made her feel wolfish and misanthropic to all the world—and to these two ladies more than all others.

"What hideous creatures some English women can be!" she said, almost in hearing as she passed; just as Jane, jerking her head and giving a vicious look backwards, said, in her turn:

"My word! our fine madam is beginning early! The grass don't grow under her feet! I said she was bad the first day I saw her!"

Rachel did not speak. She had a stirred and startled look; and, like Jane, glanced backward, but not viciously.

"Shameful!" continued Jane. "A young wife not two months married and carrying on in this audacious way!—flirting with Mr. Formby like anything!"

"I do not think our Mr. Formby is a man to flirt with a married woman, Jane," said Rachel timidly; but her friend snapped at her, as her manner was.

"Men are men," she said; "and the best of them are no better than they should be. Edward Formby is no more a saint than his neighbours, and she is a hussy who has been brought up in foreign parts and cannot know aught of good."

"Perhaps it is the way where she comes from," said pacific Rachel.

"Then it is not ours, and she'll have to learn better. And our Mr. Formby shouldn't have done it," said Jane.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know anything about it," said Rachel. "But I cannot believe that our Mr. Formby can do wrong."

"Oh, trust him!" cried Jane, in her shrill way. "But, goodness me, Rachel, why is your face so red? And, la, child! you have tears in your eyes!"

"It is weakness," said Rachel hurriedly. "Aunt Maria keeps the room so hot I get weak eyes when I go out."

"Oh, do you?" said Jane a little drily. "I never knew that before. You'd better bathe them with green tea, Rachel; it is the finest thing in the world for weak eyes—if, as you say, they are really going bad."

Rachel said no more. She had that at her heart which forbade her to discuss this strangely irregular weakness of her eyes, as well as forbade her to suspect Edward Formby of evil, even when he was

caught walking alone in the wood with pretty Mrs. St. Claire, not two months married. Nor dared she defend him, also because of that something at her heart which made talking of him at all a pain rather than a pleasure.

But from that day another flavour of distaste grew about Ione's name and personality here in Oakhurst. She was known to be a slattern, because she wore a dressing-gown in the morning; she was called Mrs. Pride, because she made the servant button her boots; and Dorothy Doolittle, because she could not manufacture a pudding nor boil a potato; and now she was cried out as a flirt, and no better than she should be, because she had been met walking with Edward Formby of Hillside—he leading his horse, and she as bold as you please—according to Miss Crosby's phrase—in her jaunty little toque and that fine tussore silk walking-costume! And the poor young man, Armine St. Claire, was almost forgiven the slight he had put upon the neighbourhood by finding his wife out of it, for the certain misery that was before him, with such a conglomerate of moral offences as he had married!

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTERNOON TEA.

"WE ought to have those young St. Claires to afternoon tea, my dear," said Mrs. Barrington to her daughter. "Poor young people, it would be only kind."

"Yes, mother," said Monica quietly.

She had broken the neck of her sorrow by now, and had accustomed herself to the fact of Armine's marriage and to the presence of his wife. No thought of self stood between her and her kindly sympathies for Ione. Her love for the only man who had seemed to her to realise her ideal of beauty, poetry, gentleness, and purity lay buried deep in her heart—silent, unacknowledged, unconfessed—a presence not a thought, a perfume not a passion. It was like a disembodied spirit lingering still about the scene of old delights and former life; a shadow that flickered to and fro in the sunshine and stole abroad in the starlight—that hovered over her in her sleep, and passed like a mist from before her eyes when she woke; a shadow that was her daily and hourly companion—but only a shadow, not a living being—only a haunting sense and not even an active memory. And yet it was active enough to make her wish to be Ione's friend.

Since that first interview with the young bride,

and then with Armine himself something had died within her and something had risen in its stead. It was regret which had died when sorrow would have been sin, and it was resignation which had risen in its place, as a flower springs up from the grave of the dead.

"Yes," she said, her sweet face undisturbed, and yet what an undertone of infinite sadness there was even in its stillness! "It will give them pleasure, as you say, mother; and poor Mrs. St. Claire cannot have a very brilliant kind of life here."

"It was a foolish marriage on both sides," said Mrs. Barrington, with a sympathetic sigh.

"Not a very wise one, I fear," said Monica, echoing that sigh. "But now that it is done and cannot be undone——"

She stopped.

"We must make the best of it," said her mother, completing the sentence.

"Yes," she returned.

"Well, write the notes, my dear. Let us have a pleasant little gathering. Ask some nice people. It will do the poor young things good to be asked with the nice people; and I do not suppose they will presume on it afterwards."

"They are so nice themselves," said Monica, for one of the rare times of her life pained by her mother's manner.

So sweet as she was by nature, so true a Christian by principle, how strange it was that she should always adopt this tone of superiority, of almost arrogant assumption of patronage, when speaking of Armine St. Claire! After all, were they, the Barringtons,

really so very far his superiors? And Ione—she was little like one needing the patronage of superior persons! If mother could only feel for them as kindly as now, but with less condescension!

She said nothing of all this, however, as she began her notes of invitation for the afternoon tea whereof the motive was the St. Claires. She only sighed, and wished that foolish futile wish of the earnest and conscientious, that she could make others see with her eyes—that wish, the folly of which is only equalled by the desire of the loving that all others should recognize the perfectness which love alone can find.

“We will ask Edward, of course, but he is sure not to come,” said Monica, looking up from her desk. “He has a horror of afternoon teas.”

“We can do no less than invite him,” said Mrs. Barrington; adding, with the mild disapproval of her kind; “it would be better for him if he liked these pleasant little gatherings more than he does, dear fellow. He is a dear good boy, but he is not very domestic, I fancy. And I am sorry for it.”

“No,” said Monica.

“I shall be pleased if he comes,” continued her mother. “One never knows how much good may not be done by little things of this kind. No dropping of good seed is to be despised.”

“No,” said Monica again; and on this very slender chance the note was sent to Hillside with the rest. But, to the surprise of both Monica and her mother, when the afternoon in question came, the first person to arrive was Edward Formby himself; and the next was Ione—without her husband. He had been called

out to a distance, she said, making a brave effort not to show the annoyance she felt. For she had not yet learned even the alphabet of resignation to the inevitable conditions of a medical man's life, and could never be got to understand how the claims of his profession should be superior to her own.

"But he will come to take me home," she added, glad to put herself forward as the cause of his appearance.

On which Mrs. Barrington said kindly, "I am glad of that, my dear;" and Monica added even yet more kindly, "We will take good care of you till he does come."

Was it not Armine's wife to whom she was speaking?

"Thank you," said Ione, not quite so graciously as might have been.

She did not feel that she wanted taking care of, and secretly resented this slight assault on the fringes of her liberty. That liberty was so precious! It was only another facet of her love—only an interchangeable term for her happiness. With it she had gained Armine; and she watched over it as jealously as one naturally does watch over the ark wherein is enshrined the most sacred possession of one's life.

Poor Ione! Her happiness would not have been quite so secure had she known that Armine's severe case at a distance was merely a pretext to enable him to escape the ordeal of a long afternoon at the Dower House, so that he might compress his agony into as short a space of time as was possible. He too had made heroic efforts to reduce his love to the same ghostly state as that to which Monica's had at-

tained. But he was not so successful as she had been. The ever-present irritation of Ione's love, which never allowed him to forget the mistake he had made, kept his regret more actively alive than the mere blankness of loss would have done. Had he not been married, or had not Ione loved him with such masterful passion, he could have subdued his sorrow more effectually and borne it more stoically. But it was such an incessant sting—such a constant reminder! The efforts made over himself were so unending and full of such maddening consciousness; the fight in his heart between love and duty, repentance and regret, distaste and gratitude, was so living, so strong, so terrible. There were times when he felt as if he must tell the whole truth to Ione, if only to free himself from the burning imperiousness of her love—that burning imperiousness which made him think of Monica as the blazing sunshine makes one think of the dark starlight; of the soft grey days of an English spring; of the tender tranquillity of the fading autumn; of anything that shall make one forget for a moment this ardent sun which fires the blood and maddens the brain by its very intensity of splendour. But when he fully realized this kind of weariness, then he turned back to his exacting and adoring wife in contrition and tried to believe that he was indeed grateful for her love, and responsive as became him. As if ever men were grateful for a woman's unasked love! As if their passion, not voluntarily given, can ever be evoked because of hers!

This afternoon tea, planned with so much kindness by Mrs. Barrington, was outwardly a success. All the nice people who had been invited had come; and

yet, nice people as they might be, no one eclipsed the bride. There was no mistaking Ione's natural position, wife though she was of nothing more aristocratic than a country practitioner. No one, not even Theodosia, could snub her with impunity; nor could dear Mrs. Barrington herself quite succeed in patronizing her with comfort. She held her own with such superb self-possession, such impenetrable pride, that all were foiled and baffled, on the side of impertinence and that of kindness alike.

Theodosia, however, was one of those who, when they wish to attack and have determined to annoy, are no more baffled than so many midges, no more to be foiled than so many mosquitoes. Through all this afternoon she was singularly sweet in manner to every one save Ione, whom as yet she had ignored; but she was as watchful as she was amiable. She was still unconvinced that Monica's composure was as real as it seemed to be; and this pronounced kindness to Ione rather confirmed than shook her secret suspicions. Incapable of such generosity herself, she yet knew it when she saw it, and did not confound it with indifference. Also she had heard of Ione's wood-walk with Edward Formby, and she felt as if she were on the threshold of all sorts of potential excitements—as if the curtain had just drawn up and the first act of a well-seasoned drama had been set.

Monica, Ione, and Edward Formby made a pleasant triad, a little withdrawn from the rest. Ione, treated with distinction by both, posed as a young queen, as she used to pose before her father's men at the mill. It was so natural to her to be the young queen! She did it well because it was so natural.

Presently Theo fluttered into the midst of the group, bent on mischief.

Ione had taken as strong an antipathy to Anthony Barrington's sharp-eyed and shrewd-witted wife as Theo in her turn had taken to Ione. Hence there was that kind of secret war between them which women alone know how to wage, and each put herself in mental fighting attitude whenever there was the chance of a fray.

"You are a great walker, Mrs. St. Claire?" said Theo, with an interrogative smile and accent.

Ione raised her eyes in her slow disdainful way. The question seemed innocent enough, but she scented danger all the same.

"I walk," she said, "like every one else. A great walker is another thing."

"Mrs. St. Claire is a great walker, is she not, Mr. Formby?" Theo continued, turning to Edward.

"Is she? Yes, I suppose you would say so," he answered.

"You must be a good judge," said Theo innocently.

"I, Mrs. Anthony; why?" he asked.

"You walk with her a great deal, do you not? How delightful to be able to take those long country rambles!"

Ione turned on Anthony Barrington's wife a pair of eyes which blazed with anger.

"Mr. Formby walk a great deal with me?" she repeated. "Who has put this into your head, Mrs. Barrington? or have you made it up for yourself?"

"I have heard it from twenty people at the least, and I never make things up for myself," said Theo with delicious simplicity.

It was Miss Maria Crosby only who had told her.

"And what did you hear?" asked Ione, her eyes still fixed with devouring wrath on the little woman's vivacious face, clothed in its mask of simple candour.

"That you and Mr. Formby walk about together a good deal," said Theo, as if she had said that the sky was clearing or the tide coming in.

"Oh, come now, that is going too far!" said Edward, with an uneasy kind of laugh.

"I have not heard it, dear Theo," said Monica gently.

"And is your ignorance to be the measure of my knowledge?" returned Theo sharply.

"Then if you have not made it up yourself, you have heard something so untrue that I do not care to contradict it," said Ione with disdain.

"No; I thought you would not," said Theo quite amiably.

"When I came to England, I believed I came among people who spoke the truth," said Ione.

"I fancy we are a little better in that than yourselves," returned the other, always amiable and simple.

"You are not so good!" said Ione, with an Italian uplifting of her chin, expressive of supremest contempt.

"Do all Italians get angry about trifles?" asked Theo, with the serious air of one seeking for knowledge.

"I suppose that insignificant and horrid little creatures can make them as cross as others," answered Ione.

"That would be quite natural," answered Theo. "But how different everything must be here for you, Mrs. St. Claire! How much you must have to learn

and admire in our English habits and manners!" she continued, suddenly breaking away from the subject immediately on hand and going back to the starting-point.

"As I find them at Oakhurst?" asked Ione. "I prefer those I have learned at Palermo."

"Naturally you are fond of Palermo. And it is lovely, is it not?" asked Monica, eager to create a diversion, distressed as she was by this crossing of swords between her brother's wife and Armine's.

"Yes," answered Ione hardily. "Of course I love it best of all places in the world—my own old home and all my dear friends—of course! The people are so sweet-tempered and easy to deal with! so good and amiable and well-bred! They never say disagreeable things or try to make one uncomfortable, as you English people do. You are so harsh and rude in comparison with them."

Which speech, by the way, was scarcely an illustration of Palermitan good-breeding.

"You find your set here unpleasant?—I am so sorry!" said Theo sympathetically.

"My set?" repeated Ione. "What do you mean, Mrs. Barrington? My set is yours."

"Do you really think so?" asked Theodosia, with arched eyebrows. "I should not have thought that. But what a pity you married an ill-tempered Englishman, and not one of those dear good-natured Italians!" she continued, as if she were saying the most kind-hearted and sympathizing thing possible. "It must be dreadful for you, with a cross man, at this wretched little Oakhurst!"

"I do not deserve your pity," said Ione with fire.

"I married my husband, not Oakhurst. And I did not say that he was unamiable. I said others."

"But it must be dreadful for you all the same," said Theo, still sympathetic.

Ione rose to the fly.

"Perhaps you cannot understand that one should love some one better than oneself and everything else," she said, with an accent which meant to imply Theodosia's utter ignorance of the power of loving. "We learn to love in Sicily. You English marry only for money, but we for love," she added emphatically.

Theodosia again arched her well-shaped eyebrows.

"I always thought that, with you, the men married for money only, and the women were sold like slaves," she said; "that not a man could be found in all Italy who would marry a girl without a dot; and that you did all your love-making after, not before, and with every man in the world rather than your own husbands."

"So bad as all that, Theo?" asked Monica, with a laugh that vainly tried to make the whole thing a bad joke.

"What can you, or any of you English people, know of Italy?" sneered Ione. "You come over for perhaps two months—rush into all the picture-galleries and churches—do Sicily in a week; and then go home and say you know the Italians! You know them as little——"

"As you know the English," interrupted Theo with a laugh.

"I? I *am* English!" said Ione, lifting her head.

"I don't think we quite acknowledge you!" said Theo. "If you were English you would not do the

things you do, Mrs. St. Claire; or if you did, you would hear of them again from some one."

"Theo!" said Monica, with forced gaiety, "what an odd creature you are!"

"People may say of me what they like," replied Ione; "I shall do just as I think proper, and I do not care what the whole world thinks!"

"You are quite right, Mrs. St. Claire," said Edward.

"You will find instead that you are quite wrong," put in Theo.

Monica laid her hand on the young wife's arm.

"You will never even want to do what others do not, dear Mrs. St. Claire," she said softly. "So you are quite right," as Edward says.

"What a mass of contradiction you are, Monica!" cried Theo. "You and Mr. Formby are the worst advisers in the world!"

At this moment Armine came into the room, and the sparring between Theodosia and Ione perforce ceased.

St. Claire was deadly pale as he passed through the crowd to where Mrs. Barrington sat on the sofa, facing the door, but his manner was as quiet and apparently as self-possessed, and his bearing was as graceful, as of old. No one could have seen that anything was amiss with him save for that dead-white face, which made his eyes look so large and mournful, and for that artificially composed manner which of itself betrays the fact of effort. After he had spoken to Mrs. Barrington, he made his way towards the group sitting a little apart, seeing in it only Monica by the side of Edward Formby, her naturally assigned hus-

band, and Ione, as the eternal negative set against his own happiness. As he came up, Ione turned her eyes on him with a kind of triumph in them not difficult to read. Here was her vindication—the Apologia for her life—the worthy cause of all that she had done—the idol for whom she had descended from her own pedestal of pride to carry incense in the service of love. She spoke to him, as he greeted Monica, with that imperious kind of accent which her love and its rights gave her, and made room for him on the sofa beside her. He returned her look with a gentle smile, but took a chair at some distance from her—placing himself between Monica and Theodosia.

Edward Formby's face suddenly changed. He flushed as if a blast from a furnace had blown on him, and, rising abruptly from his place, went across the room to where Anthony loomed large and heavy among his fellow-men, bored and boring. Theodosia looked after him with marked surprise, then said to Armine in her shrill way: "You have frightened Mr. Formby away, Dr. St. Claire. Have you had a quarrel?"

"With Formby? one of my best friends? Certainly not!" said Armine.

"It is always the best friend," she said, more shrilly than before.

"With whom one quarrels? I hope not," he answered, glancing rapidly at Monica.

"How did you find that man?" asked Ione, in an indescribable tone of mingled authority and intimacy.

It was the flourish of her marriage-lines in the face of the world—the assertion of her right of possession.

"Better," answered Armine curtly.

"What is the matter with him?" she asked, in the same way as before.

"We do not talk shop in public, dear," was his reply, made very gently as to voice and manner, and accompanied by a smile; yet all the same made as an unmistakable rebuke and repression.

"But if I choose to talk shop?" said Ione, without gentleness or a smile.

Her husband did not seem to hear her.

"How are you getting on with your fret-work, Mrs. Barrington?" he asked Theodosia, giving the knife a cruel turn in his own wound.

"Why do you ask *me*?—I who know so little, and have not learned. Why do you not ask Monica? You taught her, not me," said Theodosia.

"I cannot claim the honour of having taught Miss Barrington anything," returned Armine.

"No? I thought you had been her master in a great deal," said Theo demurely.

"Theo!" said Monica, her face suddenly flushing.

Ione looked from one to the other. There was something here that she did not understand; something of which her sensitive jealousy caught the shadow without discerning the shape. She did not know what was there before her; she only knew there was something.

"Did you teach Miss Barrington fret-work, Armine?" she asked in her quietest voice, her glittering eyes narrowed to a mere line. "I did not know that," she added slowly.

"You did not know what did not exist," he answered, as gently as he had spoken before.

"When you know my sister better you will under-

stand how to take her," said Monica. "Dr. St. Claire's teaching consisted in lending me a few patterns. By-the-by, I have them still," she added, turning to him and speaking with studied indifference. "I must look them out and send them back."

"Do not give yourself any trouble. They are perfectly useless to me," said Armine.

He would so much rather she kept them. At least they would be a little link, silent and secret as their unhappy love, but always a link!

"Why do you deny it?" asked Theodosia, looking from Dr. St. Claire to Monica and back again. "What is there to deny or be ashamed of? How funny you two people are!"

"You shall teach me, Armine," said Ione imperiously.

"It is such a pretty amusement!" said Monica.

"Have you time to learn, dear?" asked St. Claire of his wife, that pale smile again about his lips, and his manner almost ostentatiously gentle.

"If I say I have, I have," was her reply.

She had never spoken like this to him before. Since her marriage she had been so happy, so content with fate and life, that she had dropped all the angularities of her former self and had become as soft as a silken ball. But to-day, irritated by Theodosia's insolence, and now excited by her insinuations, she was no longer the Ione of these later halcyon times, but the Ione of Palermo, the moral Ishmaelite whose hand was against every one—even against the man she loved.

"If you are going to learn, I will lend you my first patterns," said Monica, very kindly.

"If my husband will not teach me, no one else shall," said Ione unpleasantly.

"Of course he will," said Monica; and Armine added, with a little too much eagerness: "Of course, if you wish it, Ione. I shall only be too happy."

Ione's face, which had become proud and set, neither softened nor brightened. What business had this Miss Barrington to answer for her husband? If she herself could not answer for him, no one else should.

It was but a slight matter on which to found displeasure, but it was quite enough to make Ione sullen and silent during the walk home; and Armine, glad of her silence because of the respite it gave him from her love, did not seek to break it. Thus the two paced along the highway a little apart, though in line, looking as if they had quarrelled; and Ione feeling as she looked.

All through the evening Ione was cross and moody, suffering as she used to suffer at Palermo when the heavens seemed shut against her and no pitying God lived to listen to her prayer. It was the first day since her marriage that she had felt this frightful spiritual loneliness which had been her torture in the past, and, with the superstition of her kind, she connected this rift in her well-tuned lute with the Barringtons, and credited them with future disaster.

"I shall be made unhappy by them," she said to herself, and hated them all, as she thus thought—even that soft-voiced, gentle-faced Monica, who yet seemed so sincerely desirous to be kind to her. "But I do not want her to be kind to me. I want only Armine's

love, and my rights. And his love is my right," she added, almost aloud.

She looked at her husband sitting at the table reading. Suddenly she got up from her place and went over to him.

"My darling!" she said, putting her hands round his throat and bending back his head while she kissed his face, feverishly, as one kisses something thought to have been lost and now found—as one answers the love despaired of and now granted.

"Dear Ione!" he said gently, smoothing her hair and returning her kiss as if he had given a flower for a flame. "But you must let me read now, my dear. I have my cases to study."

His finger was between the pages, and he opened the book as he spoke.

"You are always occupied when I want you!" she replied petulantly. "You are out all the day, and in the evening, when you ought to belong to me, you say you have to read up for your horrid cases. It is too bad, Armine! I did not marry you to be treated like this!"

He sighed, and laid his book open face downward on the table.

"But if I do not study, dear love, I cannot practise. I shall never get on," he said gently as before.

"You can read in the morning," she returned sullenly.

"When I am seeing patients?"

"The evening is mine. You should not neglect me as you do," she said.

"Neglect you, dear? I do not neglect you, Ione!"

He spoke tenderly, and with that remonstrance

against supposed coldness which means more than assertion.

"Yes," she said, "you do. You no longer love me, Armine!—you no longer care for me—I who have loved you so much!"

She spoke at random, not believing her own words, but the mere thought was too much for her. Were it true, it would be her death-warrant.

Overcome by the passion of her fancy, she flung herself at his feet, and, laying her head on his knees, as she crouched like some imploring suppliant before him, she burst into a flood of tears. For the moment she had no rights; she had only sorrows.

"If you do not love me, Armine, I shall die!" she sobbed.

He put his arms round her, his face deadly white, his lips drawn and quivering.

"Foolish child!" he said; "you know that I love you. Why do you make yourself and me unhappy for a mere fancy?"

"Say it again, Armine! say it again!" she said, lifting up her face, tear-stained and disordered, but as divine as the Medusa's in her agony, as full of love as Semele's in the moment of her prayer. I am so wretched—so heart-broken—tell me that you love me, darling—again! again!"

"You know that I love you!" he repeated in a steady voice; and Ione, seizing his hands, kissed them till they burnt like fire under her lips.

"My life! my love!" she said, her glorious eyes shining through their tears with that light which once before had almost blinded him. "Your love is all my life—all I care for in this world or the next! With-

out it I should die! Must I die, Armine?" she added in a caressing tone, her voice modulated to the sweetest music as she raised one hand and bent his face down to hers.

"No; live, poor child!" he answered, laying his hand over her eyes to shut them from his sight; saying to himself: "Would to God that I did not!"

CHAPTER IX.

HER HUSBAND'S FRIEND.

BACHELORS' parties are notoriously charming, and Edward Formby's were the most charming of their kind. It was always an earnest of pleasant hours set in a golden circlet of generous hospitality when those clumsily written, rudely folded notes were sent out, and a luncheon or a dinner at Hillside was offered to the neighbourhood. The men felt freer there than at places where there was a lady to keep the reins tight, sniffing disdainfully at cigar ash, and measuring the after-dinner magnums as vices to be deprecated even when perforce allowed. And the women amused themselves by examining everything within their range, and noting the difference between their host's management and their own. And as mixed with this curiosity was always a dash of pity for the poor young man's loneliness and certain discomfort—his bad treatment by his servants, who of course got their will of him in all directions, and plucked him bare to feather their own nests well—they enjoyed themselves immensely; personally profiting by his unwived condition while saying how much better everything would be were there but a lady like one of themselves at the head of affairs.

Hence when, two days after the meeting of forces at the Dower House, notes of invitation to a luncheon

party at Hillside fell on about twenty of what Mrs. Barrington called the nice people, those who accepted at all accepted with alacrity, feeling sure that the fates were preparing for them a day which, if it did not count as so much solid substance in their life's happiness, would at least take rank as a very well-flavoured social sweetmeat.

Mrs. Barrington had invited the nice people to meet the St. Claires at afternoon tea:—Edward Formby threw beyond her cast into the enlarged domain of luncheon. It was a repetition of the time when he had made the handsome young doctor, newly settled in the place, one with the male aristoi round about. But what he had done then with good-will he did now with enthusiasm of a rather more intense kind than he acknowledged to himself. Spurred on by this enthusiasm for the sacred rights of woman, as represented by Ione, and the holy cause of social equality as embodied in Ione's husband, he made the young bride the chief lady of the occasion, and took her into luncheon before even the Dowager Lady Hinton, who was naturally the queen regnant of the district. It was a rash thing to do; but Edward was not one to measure the width of the leap when he had made up his mind to take it. And he had made up his mind to treat Mrs. St. Claire, the portionless bride of the local practitioner, as if she had been a direct descendant from the Plantagenets and the owner of half the manors in the place. He did not reflect that he might do her more harm than good by his chivalry. He only thought how best to emphasize his admiration for the pretty woman who had come among them like a being from another sphere, and how to hold her

with most determination shoulder-high above every one else.

The Honourable Mrs. Tanner and the Dowager Lady Hinton whispered together; and they and all the other well-born matrons exchanged looks which were more eloquent than words. They were deeply affronted; even though Edward Formby was such a dear boy, and Hillside would be such a charming home for Julia or Mabel, Maud or Mary—Monica Barrington showing no haste to make it her own. But Ione, the cause of their displeasure, was no whit moved. She took this attention, as she took all others paid her, as hers by right; just as Armine had done in his bachelor days when he lived with the first set and was ranked with the second. It made the other ladies even more angry with her than with Edward, to see her walk in on his arm as proudly in one way and as unconcernedly in another as if she had been one of themselves. When great people patronize little ones, the least they expect is the gratitude of humility in return. And this new girl, this country doctor's wife, was evidently neither grateful nor humble.

In pairing off his guests, Edward, without thought or knowledge of any kind, gave Monica to Armine, as he would have given his sister to Ione's husband, for better emphasis and declaration.

What need have we of ghosts to glide about the battlements and haunt the dim chambers of the castle? We carry our own with us, and have no room for others. The ghosts of murdered love, of withered joys, of strangled hopes, of dead beliefs—we have them incorporate with the very substance of our life. They lie in our bosom and pulsate in our heart; their sighs

are in our breath, their tears are in our blood; and when we smile, they whisper to us softly, like the cadence of a funeral hymn beating up the valley against the joy-bells. No day dawns without their pale faces meeting ours as we look towards the sun, and the night never comes when we can lay them down to rest before us. The shadows of the past lie over the present and its ghosts live with us, so that we sometimes do not know which is true and which is fancy—that burning life of the long ago, or this pallid death of to-day.

Those two young people sitting there, apparently living and solid as the rest, were in reality as shadowy, one to the other, as the souls of the dead meeting mournfully in Hades. Between them lay that terrible gulf which nothing now could bridge over. They must not even look at each other across it. They must not consciously remember that it existed at all. It were a sin even to recognize it. Does a woman ever consciously remember that such a gulf exists between herself and a beloved brother? As little then must they—these two who had loved—and who now must ignore and forget.

Strong in her purity and patience, Monica could bear with a sad kind of equanimity this ordeal born of the new order of things. She looked at Ione, measured her beauty and that strange charm which stung while it attracted, and felt herself distanced beyond the reach of jealousy. It was to have been expected. She was too beautiful to resist.

On his side, Armine looked from Ione to Monica, thinking how far superior the pearly purity of this latter was to his young wife's golden glory. For a

painter's model, Ione—for the charm of life and the holiness of thought, then Monica!

Opposite to them sat Theodosia, her herd of invisible thoughts always trotting restlessly through her small head. But save the excessive pallor of Armine, and the rather more than natural quietness of Monica, she saw nothing that could enlighten her; and the luncheon passed decorously, as luncheons generally do. Only once, when Monica said, "How very lovely Mrs. St. Claire looks to-day!" Armine's pale face changed colour, and something, which the little woman watching so sharply could not read, came into his eyes. He was too loyal to disclaim the praise which was Ione's due. But he longed to be able to say, "Her beauty is my bane—her love is my torture!"

As he could not say this, he merely answered as any other husband would: "You are very kind to say so. I think she is looking well to-day."

And this trivial reply was the most painful thing of the whole of this bitter-sweet time, so full of pain and pleasure as it was.

Conversation between these two, so closely united and so widely separated, was difficult and hedged round with thorns and briars. When Monica asked about Italy, each remembered the reason for Armine's going, which made the past a kind of challenge flung in the face of the present. When she spoke of Ione, she saw what it cost him to reply. She could not talk of herself, for she had no facts to tell him and her feelings she must conceal; nor could she question him of himself for the same reason. Hence their talk was spasmodic and unsatisfactory, and as subdued as the whispers of those who walk among graves, fearful lest

too loud a voice should waken the dead. They were like two thirsty deer, lapping at the stones of a dried watercourse where the living fount was guarded by lions. Yet Monica believed that of course Armine no longer loved her, having married Ione; and Armine believed that of course Monica no longer respected him, seeing how false he had been both to himself and to her. And yet, each felt that it would not be well to go too deep into analysis.

At the head of the broad table, where Ione sat by Edward Formby, conversation was far brisker than it was here between these two, who had so much to tell and so little to say. He asked her all sorts of questions about herself, and was as much interested in her habits as if he had it at heart to harmonize them with his own. He was really quite pained when she told him that she had never been on horseback in her life, at least not as English people count being on horseback; that she could not play lawn-tennis; knew nothing of the laws of cricket; could not tell a foxhound from a harrier, though she did understand a Maltese from a pug; but he brightened up considerably when she said that she could swim, and that she regretted her ignorance of those other accomplishments, and wished she could redeem the lost time.

"I will lend you a horse," he then said, with a joyous look and blithe intonation. "I have the jolliest little mare that will carry you like a bird. Every Englishwoman ought to know how to ride, and you will soon have a perfect seat. You are just the kind for it."

"Thank you," said Ione, with a rapid glance at Theodosia.

Edward followed her eyes. He laughed aloud.

"You are not to be frightened by a little gossip?" he said in an under-voice. "If you are, you may live all your life in fear at Oakhurst."

"I am afraid of nothing," said Ione, throwing up her head and making the Italian sound of disdain.

"So I should have thought," he said with admiration.

She looked at him with a slight smile.

"Except of brigands in a lonely wood," she said prettily.

"By George, yes! that is quite allowable!" he cried, laughing. "Then, when will you come for your first ride?" he asked. "No time like the present for fixing things."

Something crossed Ione's mood. A sudden blush of pleasure mingled with doubt flashed over her face, but did not linger there, and she looked at her husband as if seeking for direction. He was looking at Monica, and the magnetic power of those glorious eyes failed to attract his attention. Angry that he did not return her look, Ione said abruptly to her host: "You are quite right, Mr. Formby. Come to-morrow. If I am to learn at all I might as well begin to-morrow."

She spoke rather loudly, her voice vibrating like metal rods, as it did when she was displeased.

"Quite too utterly delighted," laughed Edward, charmed by her ready acquiescence and meaning no evil in the arrangement—sower of wild oats though he was, with a few handfuls still left in the sack. Those healthy, headstrong, non-introspective people never mean evil. They do it all the same; but they rush into it without foresight, as one running swiftly down

a mountain side rushes over the precipice, unable to pull up in time and not knowing where he is going.

"But how about the habit?" then said Edward. "If you have not been accustomed to ride you have no hat or habit!"

His handsome, ruddy face, which was so like a faun's, looked as pained as if he had encountered a real sorrow. A proper hat and well-fitting habit were as much among the things which were *de rigueur* with ladies as gloves in a ball-room.

"Cannot I make a shawl do duty for a skirt?" asked Ione, with recollections of the mules at Segestæ.

"Oh no, that is impossible!" he answered, really shocked by the suggestion. "We must do better than that. I'll tell you what we can do. Monica Barrington will lend you hers till you get your own made. It may not be quite a fit, but it will do at a pinch."

"I do not like borrowing," said Ione proudly.

"Just this once. It does not signify borrowing from Monica. She is such a capital girl! And no one need mind what she does for them. Besides, it is not like anything else. Hats and habits are not necessities where there have been no horses."

"No," said Ione sagely.

"Then I have settled all that first-rate!" cried Edward, as joyously as if he had found a prize. "We will speak to Monica and get the thing arranged."

So it was all set square between them; and Ione consented to borrow Monica's hat and habit, difference of fit notwithstanding, and to take her first ride to-morrow on Edward Formby's dainty, clever, and sure-footed little mare, which was just made to carry her. But if Armine had looked at her when she had looked

at him, perhaps she would have put the subject by and have refused her consent to the whole thing.

When they went back into the drawing-room, Ione, beckoning to her husband, strolled away into the conservatory into which the room opened. She must have a moment alone with him! Under cover of the ferns and flowers she must make him feel the vitality of her passion and return the loving caress of her eyes! She should die else! she should suffocate! Dear Armine!—sweet, precious, darling Armine—how she loved him!

A bird was singing loudly in a cage hung up among the passion-flowers which covered the supporting pillars. It was a canary, of the same kind as that which Ione had killed at Palermo.

"How like poor Mimi!" she said, stopping before the cage. "Poor pretty faithless little Mimi!"

Armine was not specially delighted by the reminiscence.

"Yes," he said gravely. "Poor little Mimi!"

"Inconstant little wretch!" said Ione with sudden bitterness. "He deserved it!"

"Do you think so?" said Armine, still grave, and speaking a little wearily.

Edward Formby came up to them at that moment. They were standing by the cage, Armine looking at the bird, Ione looking at Armine.

"Are you admiring my bird?" he said, in his hearty unconscious way. "Is he not a stunning little chap? He can do all sorts of things; sham dead, hop lame, and obey the word of command like a trick horse or a trained dog. He is the jolliest little brute! Here, Jack, Jack! come out, my boy, and show your-

self," he added, opening the door of the cage and putting in his hand, on which the bird hopped, chirping and fluttering his wings, pleased to be taken notice of by his master.

After he had been put through his paces, as Edward called it, Ione held out her hand.

"I wonder if he will come to me?" she said, speaking to the bird in its own language. It looked at her curiously, chirped to its master, then flew on to her hand, and fluttered its wings as it had done before.

Edward laughed and looked greatly pleased.

"He is not generally so sociable," he said. "I never saw him do that before. Jolly little beast! He knows his friends, you see!"

"I should not like him to go to any one else if he were mine," said Ione.

"No? why not?" answered Edward with surprise. "I am very glad that he likes you. It shows his good taste."

"Mr. Formby is more amiable than I am, is he not, Armine?" Ione said hardily, laying her disengaged hand on her husband's shoulder.

"Is he?" returned Armine.

He knew quite well what she meant; but he was in an unamiable mood at this moment. It was seldom that he felt so peevish as he did now. If only he could check Ione's excessive love—repress her demonstrations—he should hold it for such unspeakable relief! If only she would forget him for a moment and let him forget her!

"You know what I mean, do you not?" returned Ione; "sharing the affections of his bird. Mr. Formby is more amiable in this than I am, is he not?"

Still caressing the bird, she looked at her husband from under her level brows, with that look which was at once a challenge and a menace.

"I suppose I must confess that he is," answered Armine, with a smile as unsympathetic as his gravity had been.

"I would do it again," said Ione hastily. "I would do it to anything that left me for any one else. Anything—any one," she repeated with emphasis, no longer kept in bounds by Edward's presence, seeing that he had been taken off by Lady Hinton, who had come on the scene to see what was going on and to assert her own claims to consideration.

"Would you?" said Armine, half carelessly, half kindly. "I scarcely think you are so bad as you wish to appear, Ione. I do not believe you would."

Extremes meet. Love, as imperious as Ione's, is satisfied with as little as that which suffices for the craven and humble. It is so vigorous, so large, so self-sustaining, so magnifying, that it nourishes itself on the smallest amount of food from without—just as the craven asks only the mere permission to exist. She caught the implied praise in her husband's words; and as the grey mountain peak is turned to ruddy bronze by the first ray of sunrise, so did Armine's words transform her whole being. The angry passions which had begun to dominate her were loosened; the very outlines of her face were softened; the burning light in her eyes was quenched; her heart was filled with joy; her whole soul felt satisfied, soothed, released.

"Then you do not think I am bad all through, Armine?" she said tenderly, looking into his face with eyes which caressed him as her lips would have done

had not old Lady Hinton been peering at them through the ferns.

"Not bad at all, dear," he answered softly.

But he did not return her eloquent look. He was watching a fly that had become caught in a dionea.

"At least I am not bad to you, my own darling, my beloved!" she said, her voice lowered to a whisper as she bent towards him with a movement full of indescribable tenderness and grace, and laid her hand caressingly on his.

Armine's pale face flushed, but not with pleasure. Lady Hinton, watching them through the ferns, smiled sarcastically, and said in an audible whisper to Edward Formby: "What an extraordinary young woman!" while Edward's bronzed cheeks grew pale and his hands shook as if with fever; and then, others of the guests sauntering in, they all went on through the greenhouse into the garden, and so to the hothouses which made part of the attraction at Hillside.

Suddenly Ione gave a little cry. It expressed that kind of emotion born of surprise which is as much plain as pleasure.

"We have this all over our house at home—in Palermo!" she said, pointing to a bougainvillea, which the Hillside cultivator had reared with trouble and regarded with pride. "And this!" of a datura; "and these again!" bending over an Arabian jasmine side by side with a tuberose.

When she lifted up her face tears were in her eyes. She was astonished at herself. A week ago she would not have believed that anything reminding her of Palermo could have brought tears to her eyes. But to-day she felt strangely moved; she did not know

why. It was almost as if she were unhappy. Yet how could she be unhappy? Her husband was absolutely perfect; nevertheless she was dissatisfied and uneasy.

And all for nothing! She knew that he loved her just as much as she loved him; and that was more than life itself. But he was not so demonstrative as she was; and before people he was decidedly cold. She must accustom herself to this, unpleasant as it was. It was English; and she loved England. Still, these two experiences of society at Oakhurst had not added to her happiness, if they had gratified her pride. She was happier at home with Armine's dear head on her lap, when she could show him her love in all its fervour and receive as much as she gave. She hated these restraints! Her whole life had been one of restraint. Now, when she had the liberty of expansion, she regretted to lose it even for a few hours.

Which did not quite explain the reason why her beautiful eyes were dark and humid because she saw a few pots full of flowers which reminded her of Palermo, where she had been so wretched, and whence flight had secured her joy.

While they were still in the hothouses, a servant came with a message to St. Claire. He had been sent for to the mines, a good seven miles away, to an accident which brooked of no delay. The mines led away from Oakhurst still farther into the country than Hillside, so that he could not take Ione back with him on the way; and he must set off at once.

"But how am I to get home?" asked Ione hastily.

She was always offended when the claims of her

husband's profession clashed with her own, and could never be brought to understand that her rights were second to those of the sick.

"I am sorry, but I must go at once—I cannot help you," said Armine.

"What a pity I did not have the carriage!" said Monica. "We came in the victoria, Theo and I. Anthony is riding. I wish I could give you a seat, Mrs. St. Claire, but Theo's victoria has no third place."

"Thank you, I do not wish a place in Mrs. Barrington's carriage," said Ione ungraciously.

"Don't make yourself uneasy," said Edward. "I will see to all that. Mrs. St. Claire will be quite safe in my hands," he added, turning to Armine; "I will take good care of her and land her safe. So don't worry, my good fellow. It will be all right."

"It is not very pleasant to be left here like a parcel to be delivered at my own home," said Ione, with a smile too bitter for playfulness.

"I cannot help myself," said Armine. "I must go now at once. Thank you, Formby, you are very good. I put my wife in your hands, and I am sure you will take care of her. Good-morning. Good-bye, Ione. Good-bye, Miss Barrington."

He held out his hand to Monica, and to her only, and he looked at her the last of all to whom he bade adieu. Then, with an effort, as if he remembered himself in time, he turned to Ione and forced himself to smile; and so passed away, carrying his young wife's sunshine with him—that sunshine which cast over him so deep a shadow.

When the party broke up in due course, Ione was

naturally left the last of the guests. Edward, however, had had his dogcart brought round with the rest, and he and Ione were seated therein, side by side, before old Lady Hinton and the other matrons of pride and place had left the grounds. Still, there was a look of intimacy and assignment about the whole thing which the dowagers noted with as much displeasure as they had noted the fact of Ione's supremacy at luncheon. Patronage was one thing, equality another. The one might pass; the other was inadmissible; and Edward Formby had to receive a lesson which each one concerned made up her mind she would be the first to give him.

This sudden diversion of thought and plan made both Edward and Ione forget all about that hat and habit which she was to have borrowed from Monica Barrington for the sake of those riding-lessons which he was to give her so generously. He remembered it as he was driving her home, and proposed to go round by the Dower House to make the demand. But Ione peremptorily refused to do this, and said: No; she would wait now until she had a hat and habit of her own. It was not in her way to borrow, and she would not, even of this extremely popular and good-natured Miss Monica Barrington—said with a sarcastic inflection of her voice which rather startled unsuspecting Edward Formby.

"You do not know what to order," he answered. "If you will not ask Monica, you must let me speak to Wilson. He is a capital habit-maker when directed; but he must be kept up to the mark. I know what you want, and you do not."

"Thank you; yes; do speak to him," said Ione,

forgetting the shallow water in which the domestic bark floated, if indeed it could be called floating at all. "If I am to have it, I might as well have it perfect; and, as you say, I do not know the mysteries and should not understand what to order."

So there the matter stood. Those riding lessons were to be taken; the clever mare was to be put in requisition; and Ione's hat and habit were to be ordered under the direction of Edward Formby of Hillside. He knew what would suit her and what she ought to have. And he was her husband's sincere friend. Yes, quite true; he was this and more. Nevertheless, friend to Armine as he was, he felt that Ione was far too good both for her husband and her present position—that a man of St. Claire's weak health and slender income was not worthy of her; that her social standing was infinitely below her personal deserts; and that she ought to have married some strong, healthy, well-endowed country gentleman, with a stake in the county and a family-tree of deep roots and well-seasoned branches—a man who would have carried her on the crest of the wave and given her a home such as she deserved;—like Hillside, for instance.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST STRUGGLE.

"ARMINE, I am going to take riding-lessons," said Ione in a somewhat more cold and queenly than her usual loving manner.

A slight change had come over her of late, damping down the extreme fervour of her love, as that filmy mist, the offspring of heat and precursor of storm, veils the glare of a cloudless sky. There was no positive cloud in the sky of her love, but there was undoubtedly a dim and misty kind of obscuration which neither she nor her husband confessed. Whether confessed or not, it was there;—torture to her if to him—and herein lay the sorrow of the whole thing—both restful and refreshing, like silence after turmoil and freedom after oppression.

"I should be very glad if you could," was his reply to her announcement.

"I did not say if I could; I said I am going to," returned Ione.

"Yes? But from whom? How is it to be managed?" he asked, looking at her in some surprise.

"Your friend, Mr. Formby, will lend me a horse," she said.

"And after? When the horse is lent, who is to teach you, and who will ride with you? You see I

have so little leisure!" said Armine, with the denseness of a man whose imagination is not quickened by the jealous fears of love.

"Mr. Formby will both teach me and ride with me," said Ione, as if she had said something commonplace and nothing startling.

"Edward Formby!"

"And why not, pray?"

The young husband of the beautiful bride looked grave.

"Surely you are not going to be silly, Armine!" said Ione with unmistakable irritation. "You never take me with you. I am left to myself all day long—all day long. You cannot object to my amusing myself in the best way I can. And I shall not mind if you do," she added unpleasantly.

"I do not object to your amusing yourself, Ione. I often think, indeed, how dull and lonely your life must be, my poor child," answered Armine kindly. "But, you see, there are one or two things to be thought of in this besides the mere pleasure."

"Indeed! What are they?" she asked with indifference.

"Well, you see, you are very young and very beautiful, Ione"—the set proud face did not relax by a line; a week ago it would have brightened into more than ordinary radiance with pleasure at the compliment—"and Edward Formby is a young unmarried man, and not some steady old stager who would be like your father. And English people are strict; and I really do not think it would quite do."

"Part of that objection is an insult, and the other part foolish," said Ione.

"It is impossible to defy public opinion!" cried Armine.

"I intend to try," she said. "In Italy a married woman is free to do what she likes—I am not going to be less free in England!"

"You will ruin yourself and me," Armine returned, less reproachfully than sorrowfully.

"If you are silly enough to be ruined for such a trifle, I cannot help it," said Ione. "But I mean to have my rights."

"Do you count among those rights that of keeping a riding-horse?—you, the wife of a poor professional man, in a small country place like Oakhurst?" asked Armine.

"The horse will cost you nothing," she answered. "It will only be the riding-habit; and this is not expensive."

"No? I always thought that riding-habits were expensive," said her husband briskly, glad of the extra leverage which she herself had suggested. "In fact I know they are; and, dear Ione, I fear I cannot afford the outlay. You may be sure it grieves me to say this, but I cannot."

"It seems to me you never can afford anything for me," said Ione bitterly. "You contrive to get all you want for yourself. It is only when I want anything that you are suddenly so desperately poor!"

"Is that quite fair?" he asked.

"Fair or not, it is true," she said.

"I think not, Ione! Poor as I am, I think I share equally with you all that can be afforded."

"And I do not," said Ione.

"I told you beforehand that, as my wife, you

would be subject to all manner of privations," said Armine, with a touching little accent of regret—almost of apology. "I have always dreaded the moment when you would realize the bitter truth, and when it would press on you heavily, as it does now."

"I do not mind it in great things," she returned. "I did not expect to keep a carriage and men-servants, because you told me I should not; but I did not expect you would grudge me every little thing as you do."

"I grudge you nothing, Ione, that I can afford," he interposed warmly.

"And you might certainly let me profit by the kindness of others, without making this absurd and perfectly useless fuss," continued Ione. "You neglect me so much yourself, it is not right to object to any one else being kind to me."

"I neglect you no more than my business obliges me to do; and I am delighted when others are kind to you. You know that as well as I do. But in this matter—the expense is beyond my means for the first part, and I am honestly afraid of what the world will say for the second."

"I have told you already—I do not believe the one, and the other is an insult," said Ione.

"Believe it or not as you will," he said firmly, "it is true. I cannot afford it; and I will not run into debt."

"But, Dio mio! I must have clothes!" cried Ione scornfully. "Am I never to have a new dress, Armine?"

"I suppose you must when wanted," he said. "But there is dress and dress; and riding-habits cost more than gowns."

"Certainly they do not!" was the reply, made very positively. "That is nonsense. How can they, when they take so little stuff and have no trimming? And then they last so long and save the others. In fact a riding-habit is economy. If you think for yourself you will see it must be so," she said, in that triumphant q. e. d. manner of those who are convinced with their will.

"Dear Ione, you know that it goes to my heart to deny you anything—to thwart you in any way," said Armine gently. He was really sorry for her, and he spoke the truth when he said that it pained him to deny her or to thwart her. Not able to love her as she loved him, he did honestly try to make up for his comparative deadness by complaisance and indulgence. "But what can I do?" he added. "I will not get into debt, even for you, dear"—smiling a little sadly—"and my income is so miserably small!"

"And what am I to do?" retorted Ione. "I cannot tell Mr. Formby that I am too poor to afford myself such a trifle as a hat and habit! It would be too humiliating—too disgracefully mean and shabby!"

"Ah, child!" he said sorrowfully; "you are beginning now to feel the pinch!"

"You are making the pinch, as you call it, yourself," she answered, lifting her chin disdainfully.

"Poor girl!" he said gently.

"I do not want your pity!" said Ione, with a gesture as if she flung off something distasteful.

It was strange how her imperiousness kept pace with his greater mildness. Loving him as she did, it might have been thought that his will would have been her pleasure, and that she would have responded

to the faintest show of tenderness in him as an Æolian harp responds to the lowest sighings of the wind. And yet the thing, when fairly considered, was explicable enough. It was not his love for her that had won her—it was her passion for him that had possessed her from the beginning until now. She had loved him of her own free will, not because of his prayer; she had given, not yielded; and now when she was secretly sore because of his secret coldness, and openly irritated by his avowed opposition, she was not to be mollified by mere gentleness of manner. Gentleness is not tenderness; and love recognizes the difference.

“I am sorry you take me in this spirit,” said Armine, always grave and quiet, but with, for him, unwonted firmness. “Believe me, I am grieved to oppose your wish—to deny you any pleasure possible in this dull place.”

“Your being grieved does me no good,” replied Ione contemptuously. “You do not remember the disgraceful position you put me in with Mr. Formby. You neither remember nor care.”

“I will manage that,” said Armine. “I have no shame in confessing that I am poor. Debt is the disgrace to my mind, not self-denial: and to get what one cannot pay for, and cannot honestly afford, is surely less noble than to say frankly one has not enough money for such and such an outlay.”

“It is all very well for you to be so philosophical about it,” retorted Ione. “You have everything you want or have ever been accustomed to. It is only I who have to suffer; and after such a different life as I led at Palermo it is hard on me! But what do you

care? Nothing! So long as you enjoy yourself, and have your own way, you do not give me a thought!"

"You are unjust!" said Armine, suddenly roused and strangely moved. "When you have come back to your better self, you will be the first to acknowledge the wrong that you have done me."

He got up as he said this, and went out of the room, leaving Ione more resolute than before, and with the same kind of Ishmaelitish feeling that she used to have at Palermo when denied what she desired and held it her right to have.

In this first serious contest between them she was determined to win the day. She had taken to heart that fatal resolve, cherished by so many young wives, not to give way. It was due to herself, to her present dignity and future independence, to maintain her ground and force her husband to abandon his. The supremacy of woman was one of the assured facts of life to her; and the best-beloved man among them all was, when it came to practice, only a superior kind of hewer of wood and drawer of water for his wife's benefit. Even when figured like an Apollo—as, for instance, this beloved and adored Armine—even then he was no better than a petted slave to be coerced when he resisted, rewarded with kisses for wages when he yielded, and commanded always as a private is commanded by his captain—questioning or disobedience ranking as a sin. If she gave way now, she thought, she would have to be subordinate for ever. If she conquered now, the reins would be in her hand, not his; and her power would be consolidated. No, she would not yield; and he must. He must understand that she had married him because she loved him, not

because he had wanted her; married him of her own free will, not because of his insistence; married to ensure her freedom, not to pass under another kind of bondage, even though that were the sweet bondage of womanly love. No: she must not and would not give way. That hat and habit represented her rights, the charter of her liberties. She would take them as her colours and conquer all along the line.

While she was thinking this, sitting with her hands crossed in her lap, her eyes, with that fatal lurid light in them as in the old disturbed days, fixed on the threadbare carpet, she heard the street-door shut, and knew that her husband had left the house. Had he returned to the room and spoken to her, however pleasantly, she would have repelled him. But she was angry all the same that he had left without coming to sue for peace and be dismissed with war. Arbitrary and jealous, proud and exacting, passionate, unyielding, she was a difficult creature to manage when her temper was roused. No reasoning had any effect on her; and kindness but hardened her still more. The only thing to do with her was to leave her to fight her own wild beasts undisturbed, and to work through her moods unhelped and unhindered. It was the safer way; and at least somewhat confined the area.

While she was still sitting there, eating out her heart because Armine had not come to wish her good-bye, and submit to those vials of wrath which she would have broken over his head, a ring came to the door-bell, and Edward Formby was ushered into the room—the innocent Mephistopheles of this sullen and self-tormented Gretchen. When he left, after about an hour's stay, the whole thing was arranged, and

Ione had agreed to do that which her husband had forbidden, and to undertake what he had disallowed—Edward Formby not having a suspicion of the true state of the case. Like many rich people, he could not understand small pecuniary impossibilities. That the St. Claires should not be able to give a thousand pounds for a picture, or five hundred for a yacht—that was within reason and the range of his comprehension; but that a thing of the first necessity, like a riding-habit, should be beyond their lawful range of expenditure—that was simply incredible. Not for a moment did it occur to him that this had been a bone of contention between these two young people, or that Armine had forbidden Ione what seemed to the master of Hillside as much a matter of course as bread or meat, or shoes or gloves.

Had she confided in him, he would have thought St. Claire both mean and tyrannical, and he would have offered to reason with him and to manage him for her benefit. And had she then, as she would have done, passionately refused his advocacy, or declared that she would not accept any one's influence if her own had failed, he would have laughed, as his prototype the faun would have laughed in the woods, had a dryad refused his offering of milk and honey because she did not like the carved pattern of the beechwood bowl in which it was presented. To Edward the main thing in life was to do as you liked and get what you wanted, if you could without too great a strain on that elastic band called conscience; and to forego a good for silly pride was an imbecility of which he could not conceive any sane person guilty. And Ione was sane, and not imbecile. Hence he saw

nothing and suspected nothing; and the arrangements were made and completed without his touching the very outer edge of the truth, that all this was without Armine's knowledge and against his direct prohibition. And when he left, he left Ione dangerously radiant and disastrously triumphant, and a worse woman than she was when he found her.

She was all this in still greater measure when the habit came home, fitting her like a dark-green skin, and making her figure the most perfect thing of the kind to be found within the four seas; while the masculine hat set on the top of her golden curls became her as no hat nor bonnet had ever done before. She was superb, supreme, divine in her beauty; and as she stood before the glass and looked at herself in her new attire, as she might have looked at a stranger, she could not repress an exclamation of joy at the perfection of her beauty, the absolute grace and symmetry of her form. Really, with such a result it would have been a sin not to have had a habit and a hat!

Armine was sitting in his own room, writing down symptoms and treatment of a difficult case, when Edward Formby, followed by his groom leading a lady's horse, halted at the door. At the same moment Ione came downstairs in the dress which had been the cause of their first serious contention, and of which he had heard nothing since the day of dispute. And as that filmy little mist, already spoken of, had gone on steadily increasing and deepening, with always the same quiet and voiceless coolness—so refreshing to him, such torture to her—he had not stirred the still waters, but had let them, and the sleeping dog about his feet, lie unmolested.

"Good-bye, Armine. I am going to ride with Mr. Formby," said Ione, standing suddenly before him, pale with excitement, conscious of her beauty, proud of herself, her diplomacy, her resolution, and rejoicing in her victory. "Do I not look well?" she added hardily. "Is not my habit beautiful?"

"I see no beauty in disobedience and recklessness," said Armine coldly.

"You are not to be cross and disagreeable!" was her rejoinder, made playfully, caressingly. Having won so far, she could afford to be both caressing and complaisant. "I will give you a kiss if you will wish me a pleasant ride. I do so long to learn to ride, Armine! Ah!" she said, drawing a deep breath and straightening herself: "if you only knew how delightful it is to me to feel that I look like a lady, as I used—one with the rest and lifted out of all this miserable poverty and wretchedness into which I have sunk!"

"I am sorry for you, Ione," said Armine, suddenly vanquished. Any allusion to the poverty into which she had been brought through her love for him always touched him deeply. It was her surest hold over him. "Sorry for you, and sorry for myself!" he added.

"I do not see why you should be sorry for yourself," she answered, her sensitive pride in arms at his words. "Not many men have such a wife as I am to you," she went on to say, her nostrils quivering; "neither so loving—nor so worthy to be loved," she added with frank self-appreciation.

"No? Have I no reason to be sorry when my wife disobeys me to my face?" he replied, trying to speak playfully.

Ione's eyes blazed.

"I cannot disobey you," she said proudly. "How can I disobey when I own no authority?"

"Has a husband no authority, Ione?"

"You? over me? None!" she said. "You owe me obedience if you like, because you owe me gratitude."

"Gratitude for what? for running me into debt?" he asked, still trying to speak playfully.

"No, for loving you and marrying you," answered Ione; and Armine made no reply. "However, I have no time to talk to you now," she said hurriedly. "Mr. Formby has come for me; but I thought I would like to say good-bye to you and show you my riding-habit, else I ought to be with him. He is at the door, so come and speak to him, Armine. I cannot go out alone. It is no use your being angry. It is done now and cannot be undone, so you might as well make the best of it. Come!" she added peremptorily.

"Very well," said Armine.

As she said, it was done now and could not be undone; and what was the good of spoiling the poor girl's day of pleasure by making himself disagreeable? She had disobeyed him; but, after all, was her rebellion such a very heinous sin? Her life was, in truth, both dull and poverty-stricken, and it was only natural that she should wish to take advantage of any enjoyment that might come into it. And Edward Formby was a right good fellow, and to be trusted with Ione of all women in the world. Was he not destined for Monica? And then Armine was young himself, hence tolerant of unwisdom in the cause of pleasure, and hopeful of miracles when pay-day should come round.

And Ione had married him to her own exceeding loss; and that she should find interest, amusement, occupation, in other things beside himself was a relief, which he was ashamed to confess but which was nevertheless true.

Wherefore he went out with her to the door; and by the time he got into the street he was philosophically reconciled to the whole thing, and in no mood to cavil nor remonstrate. Really it did not much signify after all! As life ran with him nothing did signify so very much! And at the worst it would soon all be over—like a bad dream when the morning breaks.

Standing there in the full sunlight, in his shabby morning coat and threadbare, hideous woolwork slippers—Maria Crosby's gift—a little untidy as a man is who has just been rubbing up his hair while thinking over an anxious matter, who has not noticed that his necktie has worked halfway round his throat, that his shirt is crumpled and frayed at the edges, and that one cuff is unbuttoned at the wrist—this handsome but uncared-for young fellow with his look of hopelessness and weariness, and letting himself go, because there was no reason for keeping himself up, made a decided contrast to his wife and friend. Edward, in all the massive niceness of an opulent country gentleman's riding costume, and Ione, fresh and superbly beautiful in her well-fitting dark-green habit, were the salt of society well matched together; while he, pale, uncared for, and disordered, suggested dissolution and decay, and seemed to have no part in this solidity and sober splendour. But it was only of late that he had had this look of weariness and letting himself go.

In olden days he was noted for a delicate carefulness of dress which just stopped short of foppery.

"Take care of her," he said to Edward as he stood by the stirrup of Ione's horse, the groom at the head.

Edward flushed oddly as he answered, rather hurriedly:—

"Of course! You may trust me, St. Claire."

"Don't go too fast, Ione," was Armine's next exhortation as he put her up and adjusted her skirt and stirrup. "Remember this is your first day; so be prudent."

"Of course; when am I ever anything else?" she laughed back for answer.

Her husband smiled, and for an instant the vision of a tall girl walking slowly through the Villa Reale at Naples came like a living picture before his eyes. But he said nothing of this; he only looked up to the sky and said quietly: "I think the day will keep fair."

"Dead sure," echoed Edward, speaking as he wished. "Come, Mrs. St. Claire," he then said, a little impatiently; "if you are ready we will start."

"Yes, I am ready," said Ione, turning a beaming face to her husband as she and her escort went off at a slow walk down the street.

"Poor Ione!" said Armine, turning back out of the sunshine and this picture of shining opulence into the dingy squalor of his home. "How I wish——"

He did not say out to himself clearly what it was that he wished. He only went again to his study, where he leaned back in his chair, half dreaming and half thinking, but forgetting all about his anxious case and its diagnosis, till recalled to himself by the en-

trance of a patient—the ragged wife of a drunken day-labourer, who came to him with a loathsome skin-affection, brought on by poverty of food and unwholesome conditions of life generally.

What a sharp and bitter contrast the whole thing was! Edward Formby and himself—Ione, the day's companion of the one, proud and beautiful and looking as opulent as he, but the wife for all time of one who was ground between the hard millstones of poverty, and unable to extricate herself or assist him—and all without fault of his; he the sufferer by his poor father's misfortune, and the victim—yes, that was the only right word—the victim of his own compassion and her unreasoning love! How terrible it all was! how terrible! Should he mend matters were he to end them? And if he did, what would she feel, this poor, proud, passionate Ione?—and Monica?

Midway in the village a small crowd of children and idlers had assembled to witness the mount, and comment on what they saw. A few sturdy urchins shouted, and a few dogs barked in concert; and Miss Maria Crosby, from her coign of vantage at the window, saw the whole proceeding.

“Rachel, come here!” she cried. “Well, I never! What next, I wonder! Here is that hussy, dressed to the nines, riding off with our Mr. Formby. It is downright scandalous, and the neighbourhood should take notice of it! How that foolish young man can submit to it is more than I know; and see how that ne’er-do-well of a Formby watches her, as if she was made of sugar and would melt in his mouth!”

“There is no great harm in it, aunt,” said Rachel, moved partly by natural opposition to her tyrant, and

partly by that unspoken something which she carried like a bird in her bosom—her poor little life's unshared secret. "Ladies and gentlemen do ride together, so why should not they?"

"You know nothing about it," snapped her aunt. "I think that Mrs. St. Claire has fairly bewitched you, from the way you stand up for her through thick and thin. I shall begin to think you are no better than your friends, Rachel, if you go on like this much longer!"

"You may think as badly of me as you like, aunt, but you'll not make me say what I don't believe, or see harm where I don't see it! Not wild horses should!"

On which she turned away and went upstairs to her own room. And when she was safe in her solitude, she broke down into tears, saying piteously to herself: "He shouldn't do it! he shouldn't! and she a married woman too! So many as look up to him and think him just perfection—he shouldn't! he shouldn't!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE STIRRING OF THE WATERS.

THERE is no more good in having a hat and habit in which one looks like a nineteenth-century Mélusine, than there is in having a fashionable walking-costume and jaunty little toque, if one does not make use of one's possessions; especially if, in gaining them, one has made one's first stand of defiance against an adored husband. Still less is there any good in having a friend like Edward Formby, both able and willing to lighten the dead dulness of life as passed in a country town, where one's means are small and society is shy, and not profiting by one's opportunities. It would be simply waste of privilege and force; and Ione thought such waste a sin against all the economies of fortune. Wherefore the hat and habit were in constant requisition; and Edward Formby's clever little bay mare grew to consider the light weight so often poised on her back as part of the conditions of her own existence.

There was no reason why it should not be so. Armine was not jealous—and he had no cause, had he even been inclined to this disastrous vice. Edward Formby was the very model of a preux chevalier; and had Ione been a saint and he her devotee, or had he been a knight consecrated to the defence of her, his Lady, against slander and rebuke, he could not have

been more respectful, more devoted than he was now, when he carried her over the country and taught her how to get a good seat, and how to keep a firm grip with a light hand. If, when he looked at her, something more came into his face than when he looked at Monica Barrington, for example, and thoughts impossible to put into words passed like hurrying clouds through his mind, the secret shining in his eyes never flowed beyond, and his lips were as mute as his looks were eloquent.

But what Armine allowed and what was not evil in itself, the neighbourhood would not bear. The morality of a small country place is of a thorny kind, and the sensitiveness of its virtue is only equalled by the activity of its suspicion. It sees evil everywhere; and especially does it see it when a pretty young wife, brought from a strange land, goes riding about the country with an unmarried man of good fortune, whose face is like that of a faun, and who is the possessor of sacks full of wild oats, some as yet unsown, for all the bountiful crop already harvested. Appearances are so all-important in the world! That which is, is nowhere in comparison with that which seems to be. And appearances were not in Ione's favour. Wherefore, there was a general stirring of the waters at Oakhurst, and much whispering of acrid voices, as heads bent close together, and the sense of the countryside was expressed in terms, now vigorous and downright, now suggestive and subtle, but always inimical to the bride and her goings on.

Of those who most strongly condemned, Theodosia Barrington took the lead. As we know, she had for St. Claire that nameless bitterness which, when the

fever-fit has passed, women feel for the men for whom they have had a passion which looked like love and was only caprice. Theo had found the young doctor beautiful, and she thought that he had found her desirable. She had put out her little arts, and at one time believed that she had taken him in her net. When she found that she had deceived herself, and that he neither understood nor responded, she turned against him fiercely; giving no account to herself why, only conscious that St. Claire was hateful to her—a kind of moral red-rag which roused her irritation beyond control—and that the best anodyne for this irritation was to find some weak point in his armour where she could strike with effect. And she had found one now in these frequent and much-talked-of rides of Ione with Edward Formby.

“It is disgraceful!” she said to her husband one morning at breakfast. “I must say I am astonished at Edward Formby. I wonder at his taste, to begin with—all but engaged as he is to such a very different person as your sister Monica—and then I wonder at his insolence and indelicacy to the neighbourhood. Carrying on such a barefaced flirtation as this in a place like Oakhurst, where everything is known, and we are all so intimate—it is really dreadful! What ought we to do, Anthony?”

“Nothing,” said Anthony shortly.

“Nothing! You do not expect that we, the married ladies here, will submit to such a thing as this!” cried his wife, as sharp as he had been curt. “Nothing! you might as well say——”

She stopped. She had not her simile ready.

“As well say what?” asked her husband, who liked

things to be explicit, and did not relish unimaginative supplements.

"That we ought to encourage it," she answered.

"Encourage what?" Anthony asked. "What in the name of fortune are you exciting yourself about, Theo? That Edward Formby finds it amusing to ride with the doctor's wife, and the doctor does not object? I do not see that this is your business or mine, my dear girl. Edward can surely look after himself, and the morals of Mrs. St. Claire are not our affair," he added contemptuously.

"Oh, you are prejudiced in her favour, because she has fuzzy red hair and bright green eyes!" said Theo, tossing up her small, black, shining head, and "snapping" her dark eyes between their curly lashes. "All men are alike! A creature like this Mrs. St. Claire, come from no one knows where, and who is no one knows what, makes them half-crazy. And you are no better than the rest, Anthony!"

"I think the wife quite as good as the husband," returned Anthony.

"That says nothing!" said Theodosia.

Her husband looked at her across the table. She felt his eyes on her, and did not raise hers.

"Yet you made an absurd fuss about him when he was unmarried," he said, with an accent of surprise. "You would not listen to my advice then, so now you must get out of the scrape as you can. If you will associate like an equal with your social inferiors, Theo, you must expect to suffer for it. You know the old saying about silk purses and sows' ears!"

"Don't be vulgar, Anthony!" said Theodosia tartly. "Nothing is so vulgar as this horrid habit of quoting

proverbs. I cannot make out where you have picked it up!"

"Nothing so vulgar, perhaps, excepting that of a lady losing her temper for jealousy of a beautiful *roturière*!" said Anthony slowly and with an unmistakable scowl.

And Theodosia, who had common-sense of a kind, said no more. Anthony was her Jumbo, whom she dared not excite beyond what she could control. When he showed symptoms of becoming dangerous she gave in at once.

"No, dear, I am not a bit jealous!" she said with a light laugh, very well done. "No one in the world is less jealous of other women than I am. I know I am a nice little thing myself, so why should I be? Only one thing would make me jealous, and that would be—what would it be, Anthony?" she broke off with a pretty little caressing intonation, one of the daintiest weapons in her well-stocked armoury of fascination. "Dear old boo'ful Bear's deserting little wifey for any one else. Then I should be, I know,—madly! dreadfully—to break its poor little heart!"

And when she took this tone her Jumbo was conquered, and she was mistress of the situation.

"You will have to wait a long time for that, Theo," he said amiably.

"True?—the true truth?" she asked, leaning forward, with her hands clasped before her mouth, leaving only her eyes shining above.

"You silly child!—the true truth!" he returned with a heavy smile. "There is no one in the world who would suit me so well as you, Theo. You were just made for me!"

"Was I? Now that is nice of you!" said Theo, blowing him a kiss off the tips of her dainty fingers.

But as she blew it—this airy thistledown of love and reconciliation—she thought in clear and intelligible words: "If I were made for you, I cannot say you were for me; such a temper as you have, you cross old thing, and so dreadful as it is to be always having to keep you in good-humour!"

Though she had failed to incense her husband against the St. Claires, Theodosia did not give up the war which she had persuaded herself it was her duty to wage against them and all their works. She threw her line over many waters, and did her best to stir up the neighbourhood to a proper sense of the indignity done it by this open flirtation between Edward Formby, who was one of their own, and this Mrs. St. Claire, who was the unknown wife of a virtual stranger. Some hung back, and some supported her; a few went beyond her in her virtuous indignation—was she not Mrs. Anthony Barrington? and the Barringtons were social powers at Oakhurst. At all events a hostile party was made, large enough to carry weight by mere force of numbers; and the condemnation which began in a whisper threatened to end in a roar.

But neither Monica nor her mother would join in the cry; and both stood by their belief that there was no need for any cry to join in.

"Mamma, how can you be so blind! at your age and with your experience!" said Theo pertly, when dear Mrs. Barrington protested in her mild and immovable way against suspicions which dishonoured an old friend and neighbour like Edward Formby, and disgraced without hope of redemption a friendless

young creature like Mrs. St. Claire. "One would think you lived in Arcadia or Utopia, or some place like that! You never will see things as they are, and really there is no sense in making out every one just angels without faults!"

"There is less sense, my dear, in seeing faults which do not exist," returned Mrs. Barrington quietly. "I should be sorry to think so ill of my neighbours as to condemn them for so small a thing as this. There is surely no great harm in riding out together. You say yourself that Dr. St. Claire sometimes goes with them."

"Which makes it all the worse," said Theodosia. "How can he, if he is a man of honour, sanction such a thing as this between his wife and another man!"

"Such a thing as what, Theodosia?" asked Mrs. Barrington. "Such a thing as his wife's riding out under the escort of a safe and honourable gentleman like Edward Formby?"

"Safe and honourable! what rubbish!" was Theodosia's rude reply. "Edward Formby is no more safe or honourable than any one else; and any one who knows the world and does not go about with their eyes shut, can see what Mrs. St. Claire is like!"

"She is very charming and very desirous to do what is right, as well as devotedly attached to her husband," said Monica. "I know her better perhaps than any one else does, and see her oftener; and this is all I find in her."

"Now, Monica, for Heaven's sake leave off playing the ingénue!" said Theodosia with a sudden flush. "It was all very well for you to be as infatuated with Dr.

St. Claire as you were—as you are, for anything I know!—but really to include this impertinent and half-bred young woman in your craze is more than my patience can bear. It is love me love my dog, with a vengeance!—and I object to loving my friends' dogs. My own are enough!" she added with a laugh.

"I do not know what you mean, Theo," answered Monica. "Common justice, not to speak of humanity, to a young wife like Mrs. St. Claire, away from her own friends and thrown into such a different kind of life from any she has known before, does not seem to me a craze; to speak against her so bitterly as you do, for no reason that I can see, is much more of a craze if you will think of it. Why should you dislike her so much, dear? What has she done to you?"

"Yes; why should you dislike her so much, Theodosia?" chimed in Mrs. Barrington.

"And why should you uphold her through everything as if she were your dearest friend?" retorted Theodosia, answering Monica, but not her mother. "It is so very odd! I cannot make it out! Any one would think you had really been in love with that young man, and that you were even now so infatuated with him as to put up with anything—even Edward Formby's desertion—rather than find fault with him."

"Theo, you are positively too bad!" said Monica, rising in great agitation. "You presume too far."

"On what, Monica? My knowledge?" she returned.

"No; on my forbearance," said Monica. "You have no kind of respect for others or control over yourself; and some day you will get into terrible trouble. Your suspicions are like madness!"

Her face was ashen white, tears stood in her eyes, and her voice broke and trembled with emotion. Never had a random shaft struck so deep nor hit so true; and never had she felt such a sense of sacrilege and desecration. Had a Gentile laid his rude hand on the Holy of Holies, the guardian of the ark would not have felt more sacred indignation than she did now, when her feather-headed little sister-in-law tore down that concealing veil which she had reverently wrapped round her innermost soul, and laid it with all its wounds and hidden sorrows bare before the world.

"You need not look like that, Monica!" cried Theo with a hard laugh. "I have said nothing so very dreadful!"

"You do not know what you say, Theodosia," said Mrs. Barrington with unwonted sternness. "I tell you frankly, my child, if I did not think you sometimes rather unduly excited, I should take more notice of your folly. It is because I pity you that I bear with you. I do not like to think you as wicked as you would be, if you were not a little——"

"If I were not a little mad," said Theodosia with a peal of laughter. "Thank you, mamma; but I am no more mad than you are, and I have a great deal clearer insight. You see nothing that goes on before your very eyes, and then I am blamed because I do see."

"Hush, Theo! you have said enough for one time," said Monica. "You know that mother cannot bear the kind of temper that you are in to-day, and I will not hear you speak to her so rudely. Say what you like to me when we are alone, but I will not let her be disturbed."

"What humbugs you quiet girls are!" said Theo, in the manner of one making a philosophical reflection. "You are giants, where we, frank ones, are pigmies!"

"Now, Theodosia, we have had enough of this," said Mrs. Barrington, laying down her knitting and looking as if she were preparing to rise from her place. "If you persist in this kind of conversation you will oblige me to leave the room. You know my extreme dislike to the whole style of thing—to ill-natured remarks about our neighbours and rude sarcasms to ourselves. Let the subject drop. It has lasted already longer than it ought."

Theodosia smiled in an odd way.

"Mamma, I will send you some ostrich's eggs," she said quite naturally, as if she had suddenly changed the conversation and had now taken up a different topic altogether—speaking as if it were a fact and not a metaphor that she was handling.

"Thank you, my dear, but I do not know what I should do with them," returned Mrs. Barrington, accepting the fact, not catching the metaphor.

"Hatch them," said Theo; "and then there will be two—one for you and one for Monica."

"Thank you, my dear," returned Mrs. Barrington again; "but I think you had better keep them for yourself and Anthony. You have more space at the Manor than we have here; and ostriches are such unwieldy creatures, I should not know what to do with them."

Her pleasantry nearly cost Theodosia more than it was worth, though it amused her greatly at the time. For Mrs. Barrington, who had not seen the point and knew nothing of the hidden intention, spoke to her

son when next she saw him about those ostrich's eggs which Theodosia had offered her to hatch, making minute inquiries as to how that process was to be performed without a parent bird, and not sun enough in England to warm the eggs into life as on the burning sands of Africa. Yes, it nearly cost her a great deal more than it had been worth; for Anthony was both proud of, and respectful to, his mother, and, though his wife did twist him round her little finger in all that related to herself, she could not with impunity touch *his* sacred shrine, or fail in that respect which he felt she ought to pay and his mother should receive. It cost Theodosia a whole battery of caresses and a volume of endearing epithets and misleading interpretations before she was able to clear the air of suspicion or lighten her husband's heavy face of its gathering gloom of wrath—before she was able to bring back to his usual mood of apathetic serenity the man whose dulness bored her to death, but whose wrath would have consumed her alive.

After Theodosia had left the Dower House—and with the contradiction and strange entanglement of human nature she left it to do a kind action to a poor tenant—Mrs. Barrington somewhat broke down. These jarring scenes, which for the last year or so had been more frequent and more discordant than formerly, tried her nerves more than she allowed her daughter-in-law to see. She was so sorry that Anthony had married such an unsatisfactory person!—so sorry that there were no children to employ the young wife's time and soften her nature!—so sorry that she gave way to evil-speaking and slanderous insinuations as she did!—and, above all, so sorry that it was in the

obliged order of things to receive her here in this quiet, tranquil, passionless house whenever she chose to come—bringing as she did such a petulant and disturbing atmosphere which left all things in moral confusion and with the perfume brushed away from the rose-leaves!

“It is most extraordinary how from the first Anthony’s wife has made things unpleasant for us about this Dr. St. Claire,” she said, after she had wiped away a few tears which forced themselves for very weariness from her dim eyes and rested on her pale cheeks. “I cannot understand it; for after all, though he is a very creditable young man, and his wife is a rather superior kind of person for her position, they are not of so much importance as Theodosia’s dislike would make them appear. What does all this scandal signify to us? It is not our business!”

“It would be, dear mother, were it true,” said Monica. “But it is not. There is no harm in Mrs. St. Claire’s riding every now and then with Edward; and Dr. St. Claire is the last man in the world to countenance an impropriety. You know what nice feeling he has—what high principles.”

“Still, one so young and pretty as she cannot be too careful,” said Mrs. Barrington. “For her own sake she had better be warned. I should like you to speak to her, Monica, kindly and judiciously, you know, but advising her to be careful of appearances. You are the best person to do it; and I should like it done.”

“I do not think she will let me,” said Monica, who naturally shrank from the idea of interfering with Armine St. Claire’s wife. “She is always very nice to me, but I do not think she will like me to give her

advice. I fancy she has never been under much control."

"Then she had better begin now," returned Mrs. Barrington. "And it is only the part of a true friend to warn her. At least, it will shut Theodosia's mouth," she added with a sigh.

"Oh, Theo!" echoed Monica, with an impatience as rare in her as were tears from her mother. "Nothing will ever cure her of her dreadful habit of gossip and exaggeration. She has such a fatal imagination! It is incurable, for it is born with her!"

"Ah, my dear!" said her mother, as she had often said before; "it was the most terrible mistake your brother ever made when he brought home Theodosia Huntley as his wife!"

"I think it was, mother," said Monica.

"Such a fine-looking man as he is, so honourable and true, and with such a position in the county, he might have married where he would—the best in the land. As it is, he has chosen about the worst," said Mrs. Barrington; and Monica echoed: "He has indeed!" without an attempt to soften matters for her peccant sister-in-law, or to sweeten her mild mother's distaste by apologies and excuses.

The two ladies, so notoriously free from all love of scandal, ill-nature, or gossip, as they were, could never speak between themselves with favour of Anthony's wife, and they often spoke of her with disfavour. They had done their best to accept her cordially and make her their own; but she tried them too severely. And as time went on she became the source of all their annoyance, all their discomfort. Had it not been for Theodosia, it seemed to Mrs. Barrington, they

would not have had a care, nor a displeasure. With her, as one of the family, not a day passed without some crumpling of the rose-leaves, some disturbing influence brought into their life. And perhaps the most painful part of it all, to Mrs. Barrington, was the thought that this small, slight, frothy little nature had power to stir up emotions which to her stood for bad passions—power to ruffle her moral dignity and to destroy both her peace of mind and serenity of conscience. As if all life were not hacked and hewn, marred and defaced, by the minor agents rather than major!—as if this were not the supreme tragedy of human history—this power of the ignoble to hurt the noble—this cruel capacity of those who are perhaps more thoughtless than actively bad, to embitter the happiness and sear the very virtues of the loving and the true!

Foiled at the Dower House as well as discountenanced by her husband, Theodosia was none the more inclined to let this question of Edward Formby's rides with Ione rest in peace. She was too wise to speak with quotable distinctness of the affair. She did not intend to be referred to as the original hatcher of the cockatrice eggs which were strewn so thickly over poor Ione's path. But she insinuated dimly what she refrained from "planking down" in unmistakable terms; and, while she stirred the waters vigorously, kept her dredging-machine in the shadow.

This plan answered, as such plans always do answer; and not a doubt existed in the minds of the majority that a flirtation existed between Ione St. Claire and Edward Formby of Hillside, unbecoming to her state as a married woman and to his position as a

“county family.” They said no more than this; which, however, was enough. It was unbecoming; therefore reprehensible; therefore again it was in the charter of their rights as neighbours who did not flirt, and whose characters were mixed up in a general kind of social hash together, to resent—and to show their resentment when occasion occurred and opportunity offered.

And all this time, Armine, Ione, Edward, the three immediately concerned, were like Theodosia’s apocryphal ostriches; their heads were buried in the sands of innocence of intention, and they did not dream that the pursuers were upon them.

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER PRESSURE.

WHAT Armine had foreseen had now come to pass. The *res angusta domi*, always straight, had narrowed beyond the line where dignity of repute or pleasure of existence was possible. Debt had fallen on him like fetters on his wrists, like the chain and bullet round his feet; and wherever he turned he found himself beset by difficulties. Business too went as ill as the rest. He lost two substantial patients—one a man who had had aneurism and been a good pay-master; the other a woman who believed in doctors and lived on drugs.

Then a rival had set up at the other end of the town; and many of the disappointed and estranged patronized the new-comer with zeal and threw off Armine with haste. Mr. Budd, the son of a country lawyer, was a man whom they could understand and who understood them, they said. He was not like this half-French young fellow with his half-Italian wife—the two together not making one honest English whole, as Jane Wintergreen said sharply in one of those frequent discussions on the St. Claires which filled up the idle hours of Oakhurst. He was a comfortable, conformable sort of person—one of their own. And it was but right to encourage one of their own and give those foreigners the go-by. So they

did; working out the law, as set forth by class conscience, with such effect that Mr. Budd had about half the practice before he had been a month in the place.

Within the four walls of home things were no better than they were without. Ione's promise of help and work had vanished into air. To be sure she would have helped, and she would have worked, had she known how. But she soon came to the end of her powers; and of late, a little warped as she was by a vague disquiet for which she had no name, she had not even the wish to do well. The house was a standing disgrace to her mistresshood. There was neither order nor management in it; neither enjoyment in its waste nor economy in its stint. It was a hopeless muddle from end to end—a very thorn-bush of mal-administration, wherein she felt her own incapacity, and got angry with things because she was deficient in “faculty.” Then Edward Formby came with his well-groomed mare, and she was glad to escape from the sordid shabbiness of her own poverty to the elegance and pleasantness of his sufficiency. Which did not make matters better for her husband nor her household.

Debts were accumulating and creditors were getting troublesome. The tailor had sent in his bill for that famous riding-habit which was to be such an economy in saving the wear of old gowns. The butcher and the grocer, the baker and the greengrocer, and all the smaller tradesfolk were beginning to clamour for their money, and to compare among themselves the amounts written off with those still to pay; and the debts more than doubled what was owing to Ar-

mine, should all his patients pay all that was due. But some were too poor ever to pay anything at all; and he had not even this delusive margin on which to build a sand-house of hope. What was to be done? In all this large rich world, with its hundreds of thousands of wealthy philanthropists, where could he turn for help? who would hold out a hand to assist him?

In his bachelor days, Armine, as has been said, had ever been the flying-fish of the community—not frankly fraternizing with the little people, nor frankly fraternized with by the great. Now the anomaly of his position was even more apparent as his social circumstances were accentuated by his marriage, and Ione had added her pride to his in the one case, while in the other she had caused a still stricter exclusion. So that really the two had no friends of any kind, save Edward Formby and Monica Barrington. But this was by-the-by. The real centre of life at this moment was the debt in which they were becoming entangled, and the poverty which was deepening about them.

Things were looking blacker and still blacker, and reports of those gathering debts and the inability of the creditors to get any money out of the young doctor grew daily louder in the community. They reached at last the Dower House, after they had been accepted and digested by Theodosia at the Manor. But it was she who took them to her husband's mother. No one but herself would have dared.

It was at Mrs. Barrington's favourite social hour—at her five-o'clock tea, where Anthony, Theodosia, and Edward Formby one afternoon all found themselves,

that the little wife shouldered the conversation on to her former favourite and present red-rag.

"By the way," she said abruptly, turning her sharp black eyes full on Edward, "those St. Claire people seem to be in a very bad way. I hear awful things of their debt and extravagance, and how no one can be paid a farthing. It is really very disgraceful! and she all the time giving herself the airs of a lady, and he so ridiculously like a hairdresser's assistant!"

Edward's ruddy face became a still ruddier hue; Monica's, paler and more under control, grew a shade whiter.

"I see a good deal of them," said Edward bluntly; "and I see no extravagance."

"Oh, I forgot!" said Theo; "you are one of Mrs. St. Claire's adorers; so it is not likely you would see anything in her to which to object. If she had committed murder, I dare say you would find out that she had done quite right, and would acquit her on the plea of extenuating circumstances. I only hope she will not some day. She looks capable of it!"

"My dear Theodosia!" said Mrs. Barrington in her mild manner of reproof.

Anthony gave a short laugh; Edward pulled at his moustache, and looked as if he had suddenly lost the use of speech.

"Another cup of tea, Theo?" asked Monica in her dreamy way, as if she had not heard what had been said.

"Don't you think so?" returned Theo for all answer, speaking to her sister-in-law.

"Think what?" replied Monica, busied with the cream-jug, which she seemed to find it difficult to place on the tea-tray.

"That Mrs. St. Claire is like a murderess, and her husband like a hairdresser's assistant."

"No, I do not think either one or the other," said Monica. "Anthony, more tea?" she added.

"We have all had enough tea," said Theodosia testily. "You are so funny, Monica! Who ever does take more than one cup of afternoon tea? And, dear, do leave that cream-jug alone! You make such a noise with the spoons and things, it fidgets me to death to hear you!"

"My dear Theodosia!" said Mrs. Barrington again, gravely.

"Don't bully Monica, Theo," said Anthony.

"But she does make a noise when she pushes the cups and things about; and it does fidget me to see her," said Theo. "And it is only because I am talking of the St. Claires. She has taken it into her head to protect them, just as Edward has. Really people are very odd!"

"Oh, Mrs. Anthony! how you like to chaff!" said Edward Formby with a forced laugh.

It was not for him to measure swords with this intellectual little Flibbertigibbet. It would be like the contest of a cockchafer and a gnat. All he could do was to deprecate good-humouredly, and call that chaff which was in point of fact something much more solid.

"Well, I am sure it is odd that you should care to be so much with her as you are—a young woman without two ideas in her head!" said Theo, lifting up her eyebrows. "I think Mrs. St. Claire one of the most stupid people I have ever seen. She never says anything worth hearing; she never opens a book or

seems to have heard of any to open. She is frightfully ignorant and common; yet you can ride out with her day after day, day after day, and never weary of her, just a doll as she is! And you too, Monica, who go in for high art and poetry and æsthetics, and all that—how can you uphold her or pretend to like her as you do? It is all a mystery to me, I confess!”

“What makes you dislike her so much?” asked Monica quietly; but no one, save Theo herself, noticed that she did not look at her when she spoke, and that her gentle face had a certain pained look of embarrassment on it.

“I do not pay her the compliment of disliking her,” said Theo with a laugh. “I think her forward and stupid and pretentious and unladylike; and I think her husband is no better than she is. And I always have thought so. Only that you and mamma spoilt him so much, and took him so completely out of his position, I would never have asked him to the Manor. But I did not like to hang back when you made yourselves so conspicuously his friends. It seemed like a slight on you. But I am very sorry that I did now, with these disgraceful debts and everything! It is altogether most unpleasant, and I wish they would leave the place.”

“I see no unpleasantness but what you make for yourself, my dear,” said Mrs. Barrington. “No one that I know of speaks of these things; and at the worst they are not our affair.”

“Theo is right, mother,” said Anthony, in his slow, impassive way. “They have been awfully spoilt here and taken out of their proper place; that is not to be denied; and they are in debt to every one about, and

the whole place is ringing with it. And it is disgraceful and unpleasant in the extreme. But after all, as you say, it is not our affair, and each one is free to act as seems best to himself."

This seemed as if it would include his mother's and sister's freedom to protect the St. Claires if they would. It meant nothing of the kind. It was an allowance which covered only Edward Formby, and what the world had agreed to call his goings on with Ione.

"Shall we talk of something else?" said Mrs. Barrington. "I have no great love at any time for discussing my neighbours, and if I cannot hear good of them I prefer not to hear anything at all. I confess I see nothing reprehensible in the St. Claires, and I do not care to hear gossip."

"That is right, Mrs. Barrington!" said Edward heartily. "It does no good to pick holes in people's coats. And one can if one likes—anywhere and everywhere!"

"One need not pick them in the St. Claires'," said Theodosia with her shrill laugh. "They are there already. And that young lady must take care that she does not make another—and the biggest of all!" she added, with a meaning look to Edward.

Aiming at pigeons and shooting of crows is one of the most familiar experiences of our life; and this was what Theodosia Barrington now did by her unfriendliness to the St. Claires. She had wished to draw down on them the indignation she had honestly convinced herself they deserved, and instead of this she raised up for them an activity of friendship which would not have been without her. The tares which

she had thought to sow came up as fruitful corn; and Monica and Edward, so far from being checked or chilled, were stimulated and warmed.

Soon after this last shaft the Anthony Barringtons left, and then Edward Formby got up to go.

"Come down the steps, Edward," said Monica, when he took up his hat. "I want to show you some new Brahmas Price has just bought. Price says they are superb, but I should like you to see them."

"All right," said Edward, with the slightest possible touch of embarrassment.

Monica was always perfectly simple with him, but he was ever a little out of gear with her. He knew that he was expected to marry her, or at least to ask her; and she knew that she would not accept him were he to offer. Hence he felt that he had not done his duty; and she was grateful that he had spared her the pain of not doing hers—if indeed it were her duty to marry for the fitness of things, and not for the desire of her heart.

"Is it true what Theo says of the St. Claires—that they are so deeply in debt?" she asked as she was going down the steps.

"I am afraid some of it is true," he answered. "I think Mrs. Anthony exaggerated, you know; but I fancy there is some fire under the smoke. There generally is."

"I am so sorry," said Monica. "Can nothing be done for them?"

She looked up into his face when she said this. Her own was anxious and troubled—strangely so for the occasion, Edward thought to himself—just a passing thought, not striking deep and not clinging long.

"What can?" he answered.

"I do not know," said Monica. "Some one might lend them some money. Unfortunately I cannot, else I would. I would send Mrs. St. Claire a present anonymously, and take care that she did not find out where it came from."

As she said this, Monica's pretty short upper lip trembled, and she looked down shyly.

"Ah! that would be a good way," said Edward.

"But I cannot do it!" said Monica. "Only yesterday Anthony took my bank-book and insisted on investing what I had. He was vexed, too, that I had not more; and I am such a bad woman of business, I could not account for certain sums. So he drew out all but a mere pittance, saying I was not fit to be trusted with money; and now I am quite poor."

"Anthony was right," said Edward. "You ought to invest your savings, Monica."

"So he says, but I cannot see it," was her reply. "I have no one to save for, and it simply prevents my doing as I like—helping some one, for instance, in whom I feel so much interest as in this poor *déplacée* Mrs. St. Claire."

"Don't worry yourself," said Edward. "Save your money, Monica. If you have no one to leave it to now, you may have some day."

"I think I never shall," she answered gently.

"No?" he said, not looking at her. "But you will marry some day, my dear."

"Never!" she said. "I shall never marry, Edward. Nothing should ever induce me to leave my mother. I do not intend to marry—ever—any one."

She repeated this emphatically;—she looking up

at him, he looking away into the distance, but conscious of her eyes.

He gave a deep sigh. It might have been for disappointment, but it might also have been for relief. He brought his eyes back from the distance and turned them down on her uplifted face. Something that was not a tear, but looked like the precursor of tears, shone in his eyes, and made them soft and dark.

"You are the best girl in the world, Monica," he said tenderly. "You ought to be canonized. They have made worse saints than you, my dear!"

"And better!" she laughed, with a pretty shake of her head. "If I were a saint, I would extend my protection to these poor young people," she added, bringing the conversation back again to its starting-point.

"So you shall, through me," he returned. "I will see to it all. I will go to St. Claire to-day, and tell him I will pull him through, and he shall not suffer. Do not be uneasy. My God, no!"

He said these last words under his breath, and with profound agitation. Did he mean them for Monica or Ione?

"Ah, how good you are, Edward!" said Monica. "I always knew that you were to be depended on!"

"I hope so," he returned, with a deep flush.

Somehow her praise stung rather than soothed him, as his had pained rather than pleased her. Was he in very truth to be always depended on? Could Monica say that for the past? he would not ask himself—should Armine be able to say it for all the future? And Monica, in like manner, felt that were

Edward to know all that had been in her heart in time past for Armine, he would scarcely call her a saint now, because she wished to see him free of debt and lifted above distress.

And with this they came to the last of the steps, and turned round to the poultry-yard, where the Brahmas strutted in their allotted compound, the innocent pretexts for this important talk.

After a brief inspection of the handsome fowls, in which he was at once interested, as became a country gentleman solicitous for pure breeds, and for which Monica did not care two straws, Edward took his leave—the two never so much like lovers, never so sincerely attached as now when they had just consulted together for the benefit of the woman who called Armine her husband—of the man who owned Ione as his wife.

Sure enough, the next morning Armine St. Claire held in his hands Edward Formby's cheque, which was to release him—and Ione—from all present embarrassment, and enable them to "see about them a little," as the note which accompanied the cheque expressed it. That note was written in Edward Formby's special style—badly spelt and full of grammatical errors; but, as once before, it was so full of genuine kindness and delicacy that its errors were more precious than other folks' exactness. It was like manna in the wilderness, like a cup of water in the desert; and though Armine might have refused it had he been alone—preferring to submit to sorrow rather than save himself by another man's hand—yet now, with Ione on his neck—Ione to suffer as well as himself—he yielded to the temptation; and, under pres-

sure as he was, accepted the offer of release with gratitude.

With gratitude, yes; but also with shame; also with reluctance. It wounded his pride, his conscience, his self-respect. Yet, he could not doom Ione to distress from which any sacrifice of himself could deliver her. He had bound himself to be her sacrifice, and he must fulfil his task to the end. But this was one of the bitterest moments of all—one of the heaviest of the burdens to carry.

On his side Edward had an uneasy feeling that he could not get rid of, try as hard and manfully as he would. He seemed to himself to have bought something which he could never claim and never possess; and the immediate consequence of that small monetary transaction was his sudden departure for Newmarket, where races were on hand, and where he might lose, in heavy bets and perilous fancies, the haunting image of Ione St. Claire.

Meanwhile, of all concerned, Monica was the only one really satisfied, and Ione was the only one in the dark. But the materials were too explosive, and set too near to danger, for peace to be of long continuance; and it was only a question of time when the catastrophe should come.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW ARRIVAL.

IN the midst of all this gathering excitement about the St. Claires, old Thornton, of High Street, the confectioner, fancy bread-maker, and general baker of Oakhurst, "passed in his checks," and died suddenly of apoplexy. As he had amassed a small competency, his widow, who had no children to help her in the weakness of her advancing years, and who had been a hard worker in her past ones, set up the business for sale; and waited for a purchaser.

Many looked into the affair and some made impossible proposals, but no one came to a successful issue; when suddenly the modest sum demanded was paid down on the nail; the shop-fixtures, dwelling-house, good-will, and brick oven were all taken over in the account; and a new man entered on the old place.

He was a foreigner, speaking English of a somewhat dislocated kind, but good enough to be understood; though he did call all things, animate and inanimate, "he" and "his," and used the verb "to make" with an indiscriminate generosity that covered everything. This, however, was a small matter; the large one was that he paid the money down after a certain course of haggling wherein he had to give way and where, keen as he was, he found Mrs. Thornton

his worthy match. Hence there was no need to question his solvency nor to look into his antecedents. His crisp bank-notes were his sponsors, and he wanted no others.

It was against the widow's conscience to sell the concern to a foreigner, whose existence she qualified by an epithet more racy than nice. But what was to be done, she said, when one's own would not come forward as they should? If home public spirit was dead she had to do the best she could with what she could get from abroad. The wear and tear of the business was too much for her since her good man's death, and if she could not get rid of it it would soon get rid of her.

This she said by way of excuse and apology to the neighbourhood—the neighbourhood patriotically not approving of the transfer, and doubtful whether it would take kindly to the change.

That change indeed was very thorough. The whole aspect of the shop, as well as the manner of doing business, was altered; and Oakhurst was not fond of innovations. There was the Sunday-dinner baking as of old, but the result was not so satisfactory as in Joe Thornton's time; for the pies came out at one time sodden and at another burned. The bread, too, was queer and had an odd taste, as if spice or herbs were put into it; and the cakes were not the cakes of by-gone times. But they were good in their own way—sometimes over-flavoured with rum perhaps, and sometimes too dry and leathery: but for the most part they were approved of; and the sweets were acknowledged to be perfection. The shop was differently decorated and differently stocked throughout from what it had

been in times past. Instead of the tall bottles of rose-lozenges and barley-sugar, bulls'-eyes and pear-drops, with all the other well-known sweeties dear to British youth; instead of the opaque white and transparent yellow glass moulds, to represent blanc-mange and jelly—the plates of Bath-buns and raspberry tarts, of sponge-cakes and macaroons, covered with yellow muslin to keep them from the wasps and flies—there were now piles of lemons and tiers of red-coloured jelly, with variegated sweets of odd shapes and strange compounds, the like of which had never been seen in Oakhurst since Oakhurst began. There were fruit tarts too, made in plates without a covering crust; which aroused the scornful mirth of all good housewives. “Strawberries and cherries laid on paste in that daft-like fashion!” they said, with their heads in the air and their lips crisped as tight as closed purses. “Not perhaps bad in themselves; but lor-a-mussy, not to be compared to our own fruit pies, where a body could cut and come again, and have his fill of good rich flaky crust, which was something to be proud of when it was done!” But, indeed, all the things were made more for show than use—more as displays of colour and ingenuity than as stays to hungry stomachs. But while it was all fresh it was the town’s talk and the town’s show. The mob of children round the window impeded traffic and gave the sentiment of popular excitement; a sentiment which was not lessened when sometimes a swarthy-complexioned man would dash out from the darkness behind the shop and send the whole cohort flying with the violence of his gestures, the roar of his unknown tongue, the fury in his eyes, and the impression generally which he left on them all

of being the very devil himself incarnate. But sometimes he was quite the other way; and then he would give both cakes and sweeties to the little ones looking with longing eyes at that raree-show of good things. And it got to be noticed that when he did thus scatter his largesse, he always gave the biggest portion to the fair-haired little girls, demanding for his reward kisses which it terrified them to death to give.

In a short time, however, the keen eyes of the good housewives aforesaid noted that not only was all this pristine brilliancy getting sadly dashed, but that if you wanted either your full shilling's-worth, or the perfection of cleanliness, you had better not go to the shop where old Joe Thornton had made his fortune by honest English ways which every one could understand, and where all had been as clean as a new pin. Now, matters were very different. Those queer whisks and feather-brushes, which were what the foreigner used for keeping things clean, were not equal to the British blue-checked duster and wholesome soap and water. And you could never believe his word when he said that his bread or his cakes had been baked fresh to-day. For if flavour and consistency went for anything it was a moral certainty that neither loaf nor cake had seen the oven for a week or more! He was unbusinesslike, too, in his manner of dealing. He had to be looked after pretty sharply in the matter of change; he often charged one price to-day and another to-morrow for the very identical thing—and then he would take less than what he first said; he sent in his bills twice, but on the other hand he often forgot to send them in at all, and would let people run into debt for bread and baking with a looseness of grip

enough to make old Joe Thornton turn in his grave. It was all so slipshod and uncertain, no one knew where to have him; and, as for keeping to his time—as for building on his promise to have that pie baked by half past twelve, or that cake made by noon tomorrow—you might as well have expected the rain to fall from a cloudless sky, or the hoar frost to last if the wind changed to the south.

The real proprietor of the concern was rarely visible. After he had concluded with Mrs. Thornton he retired to the little room behind the shop, or to the bakery, where he worked with his own hands or directed his assistant, and where both he and that assistant—a foreigner like himself—smoked all day long, to the disgust of the women, who swore that they found cigar-ash over their potatoes and the flavour of tobacco in their gravy. This incessant smoking was such an offence to the feelings of the wives that some talk was made of setting up against the interloper a rival establishment to be conducted on pure English principles; but as yet no one had come forward.

The sensitive Protestantism, too, of the place was alarmed. It saw the shadow of Jesuitism in the fact of the new-comer's strangerhood; and when it leaked out that he was an Italian, every one made sure that this Trivellato, as he called himself, was a brigand who would lurk round the corner with a dagger in the dark, and not only manage to disseminate popery with his sugar but would also add murder to his handicraft. But—the confectionery was good, the sweets were perfection, and the bread and pies grew gradually more home-like; and as no one had been found with his throat cut in a dark alley, and no priests had been

seen stealing about the lanes, the fears which had been so rife in the beginning somewhat died away, and the new confectioner's shop became rather the fashion than otherwise.

All this time the head man was never seen behind the counter. He was to be heard speaking in the little room, where he smoked and peeped through the window of the door to watch what was going on. And the women had seen him in the bakehouse when they went with their pies and toad-in-the-holes for Sunday. But the gentry had to be content with a young man who had been a short time in London; who wore his hair parted down the middle and cut into festoons like feathers on his forehead, as St. Claire had worn his when he first came to Oakhurst; and who made as deadly havoc with the hearts of the young girls of his own class as Armine had made with those of the second set in the first year of his novitiate. But he spoke English a little more idiomatically than did his proprietor, and also he understood rather better how to deal with the people. He was as deft at making lies as that proprietor was at making sweets; and altogether the concern prospered, in spite of loose business habits, stale pastry sold fresh, two prices asked and a third taken, and the flavour of tobacco in the gravy.

Somehow, no one knew why, the new shop with all it included of popery, possible assassination, and un-English qualities in general, was connected in the public mind with Mrs. Armine St. Claire. The two were twin-cherries off the same tree; but they were cherries with cankered hearts, and not to be approved of at any price. The tiers on tiers of transparent red-

coloured jelly and piles of golden lemons were as pretty to look at in their own way as the young bride's red-gold hair and lissom figure; but we want something more than mere prettiness—as Jane Wintergreen said, her sharp nose high in the air—and handsome is as handsome does.

Jane, uncompromising and staunch, had steadily vilified the productions and personality of the new confectioner from the beginning. She did not like new-fangled ways, she said sharply, when asked what she thought of this man's, this Trivellato's, sweets. She liked to know what she ate, and objected to being poisoned by outlandish condiments. Nevertheless, she sometimes went to the shop when hard pressed for a make-up and had to look about her, but she always went under protest, and with the feeling of deserting the Union Jack for the tricolour.

Naturally, like all the rest, Ione went to pay the new place a visit, to inspect the goods, and pronounce on their merits.

“They are just like Guli's!” she said in Italian with a laugh, as she looked at the sausages and galantines, the vegetables and fruits, all made of sweets.

She was radiant as she said this. She had not been happy in Palermo, and she was—or had been?—happy here in Oakhurst. All the same, it made her laugh with joy to see things which reminded her of her old home; and she felt as if this new establishment were part of herself.

The dark-skinned, soft-eyed, soft-spoken young fellow, standing with his hat on his head behind the counter, was overjoyed to hear his native tongue spoken by one who was evidently a Sicilian; and the

conversation between the two became quite animated. As a mark of special respect he took off his hat which he wore because of the draughts, and braved catching cold in this awful English climate like a hero at the cannon's mouth. For one so proud and Brahminical as Ione, the conversation was more than animated. It was friendly. The young man told her one or two things about the business, and among others that he was not the padrone. He, the padrone, did not come into the shop. He lived there—pointing backward to the rooms behind—where he made his things; for he was a gentleman, and could make cassata and peccorelle as well as Guli himself.

"Is he a Sicilian?" asked Ione. "I hear that you are."

"Sissignora," said the man, Giuseppe; "he is a Palermitan."

"What is his name?" she asked.

"Trivellato."

"I can see that for myself; it is over the shop," said Ione disdainfully. "I mean his little name."

"Giovanni."

She shook her forefinger before her face with an Italian gesture.

"I do not know him," she said. "Giovanni Trivellato. No! I do not remember him."

Giuseppe looked distressed.

"No?" he said in a tone of regret as if it were a sorrow to all concerned.

All this time two dark gleaming eyes were watching through the window of the door leading into the back-parlour; and that door, ajar, allowed every word that was spoken in the shop to be clearly heard by the listener within.

"The same! the same! and yet more beautiful than ever!" said the man to himself in Sicilian. "My life! my soul! you will come to me at last!"

This talk with Giuseppe pleased Ione, not unnaturally; and she often went to the shop for the ostensible purpose of buying cakes and ordering sweets; but in reality to speak Sicilian and discuss Palermo. Of course her frequent visits were noticed. Miss Maria Crosby's side-window commanded the whole length of the street—the doctor's house with the rest; her front faced Trivellato's. Hence all that took place between earth and sky, within the range of her vision, she saw and commented on according to her nature. And, through her, handles for scourges to lay on the backs of social sinners were never wanting in Oakhurst. Just now Ione St. Claire was the sinner par excellence of the community; and between those frequent rides with Edward Formby, and this perpetual running in and out of the new confectioner's, Miss Maria was well set up in material. The double sin was the common talk of Oakhurst; and the only people who did not hear it were Ione herself, her husband, and Edward Formby.

One evening Ione was out rather later than usual. She had been riding with Edward, and, still in her riding-habit as she was, she went up the street to Trivellato's to order some dolci for their neglected and rather scanty dinner.

"We have no cassata, Signora," said Giuseppe with an innocent face. "We have some new dolci in the inner room, if the signora will go in to see them."

"Va bene!" said Ione.

She passed through the little trap of the counter,

and went on into comparative darkness. A man was standing by the table, holding the back of a chair as if his hand were a vice, or that wooden rail were a live thing that he could press to death. She looked into his face, and at a glance recognized that swarthy skin, those gleaming eyes, that strange Saracenic countenance with its hidden passion and outward quiet smoothness.

"Vincenzo!" she said with almost a scream. "What are you doing here? Why have you come?"

"To take care of you, Signora," he said gently. "The day will come when you will want me."

"Madman! how should I want you!" she said haughtily. "How should you take care of me! I have my husband!"

"True, Signora, you have your husband," said Vincenzo slowly.

"And I want no one else," she returned quickly.

"Friends do no harm," he said.

"Friends! You forget yourself, Vincenzo. Can a servant be my friend?" she said with unspeakable pride.

His dark eyes glistened like two polished stones played on by a fiery light.

"A dog may be a friend!" he said, humbly as to mere manner; and yet there was something in the whole spirit of the man that was arrogant and authoritative and by no means humble and subservient as he wished to appear.

"You are a dog, but you can never be of use to me," said Ione.

His eyes flashed.

"We shall see," he answered in a low voice.

"What do you mean, Vincenzo?" she asked, more agitated than she cared to show. "What help, what friendship can I want? I who have all that life can give me!"

"The Signora is alone here—a stranger like myself," he said. "She has married a man who is not worthy of her. No! hear me out!" he said, raising his voice in command, as Ione prepared to speak. "The Signora loves him, therefore she does not see; but those who love her do see. This cold wooden Englishman is not worthy of her. I say it again and yet again. And the day will come when the Signora will know that I have spoken truth."

"Insolent! Brigand! Mafiose!" cried Ione transported with passion.

Vincenzo bent his head.

"Be it so," he answered. "All the same, I am the Signora's friend here. She has none other! And the day will come when she will say, 'Vincenzo, I want you! help me!'"

"I? to you? Never!" she said, all her pride and passion surging like a torrent in her soul.

Vincenzo touched her riding-habit.

"The Signora is young, beautiful, alone here," he said; "and her husband, this white-blooded Englishman, gives her into the hands of a man like this Signore, who takes her for hours into the far-off country, where no one knows where they go nor what they do. Is that Love, Signora? is that the care an Italian would have for his wife? No facchino among us would be so negligent of his honour, or expose his wife to so much danger. Would your husband, if he were worthy of you?—if"—here he bent his head

close to Ione's, and hissed between his teeth—"if he loved you?"

"Brigand!" said Ione again, striking his face with her gloved hand. "How dare you say such things to me!"

"How dare I? and if I dare not, who should!" said Vincenzo, seizing her wrists. "Do you know who I am, Signora Ione?"

"A slave! a mafiose!" cried Ione passionately. "And I will give you up to the police!"

He laughed.

"Mafiose, yes," he said. "I can confess that here. Mafiose and something more. I am your cousin, Signora Ione; and I love you. Now betray me if you dare!"

"You lie, Vincenzo, and I do not believe you," she said, shaking off his hands and confronting him with the same pride and anger as before. "My cousin? you? Liar! You are no cousin of mine, and I will have you shot! You shall be hunted out of England by the police! you shall be shot," she repeated.

"You have no mafia here," he answered, with a quick return to his former humble manner; "and the police cannot touch me, Signora. I have offended against no law, and I am in a free country. I will stay here to make cassata and peccorelle for the good English people, and to watch over your safety. I tell you again, the time will come when you will want me!"

"Never! never! never!" cried Ione. "I will never enter your shop again, Vincenzo. Insolent! Mafiose! You shall never see me here again."

"You will come to-morrow," he said slowly. "To-

tomorrow I shall have made some new dolci, and la Signora shall have her choice. You will come; do you hear? Fatherless and motherless, cast off by those who adopted you, neglected and unloved by your husband, you have only me—and always me—this poor Vincenzo who was your servant at Palermo and who is your protector in England—this poor Vincenzo who is your cousin—and who loves you!”

CHAPTER XIV.

WARS AND RUMOURS OF WARS.

IONE's halcyon days were over. Her bird of love no longer nested on a waveless sea, but beat its wings in pain and storm over the spot where once it had brooded in divinest peace. On all sides strange ills beset her, some of which she knew, while of others she saw only the advancing shadows. Of these ills the presence of Vincenzo here at Oakhurst, and the hateful revelation of her parentage which he had now made to her in full, were the most solid—doubts of her husband's love the most agonising. Before Vincenzo's arrival these doubts had already at times vaguely traversed her brain; not as thoughts made out and consolidated, but as dim fears more prophetic than actual—spiritual protoplasm lying in the depths and not yet shaped into active life. Now things were different. Through the revelation of her birth and the degradation, including his own relationship, which it involved, Vincenzo held her as a boy holds a captive

bird. She was in his power for anything that he chose to demand; and his choice was to detach her from her husband by proving to her that she was not loved. What ulterior plans he might have, he carefully concealed; and for the present he contented himself with dropping into her mind disbeliefs which were like the poison that was dropped into the ear of the king.

How should she not doubt that man whom she so loved, and for whom she had given up her all! she used to think, as she watched Armine between her half-closed lids when he sat there at the other side of the table, preoccupied, lost in thought, absent, uncompanionable. If she asked him, as she often did, peremptorily, abruptly, Of what was he thinking? he used to start as if he had been suddenly awakened out of sleep, and always made the same answer: "My cases, dear."

How she hated his profession which absorbed him so completely! and how jealous she was of its claims and of all his patients! As for his female patients, she never believed in their illnesses. They were only in love with Armine, and were trying to seduce him from his allegiance to herself. She often made scenes at home, and abroad too; even about cottagers' wives and labourers' daughters; scenes which were both bitter and loving, but of which the bitterness remained when the love was forgotten. Of late, however, Armine had not given her the details which, in the beginning, he thought might interest her and somewhat divert her passion for himself into a calmer and more generalized philanthropy. When he saw how she took them, and after she had once or twice made herself

hateful and him ridiculous, then he closed the book and told her no more. And his silence was a greater grievance to her than his confidences had been the source of pain and misleading.

He did not talk much to her on any matter; and the evenings which should have been hers—the pleasure of her soul, where her love might have had full liberty and expansion—were used for his work, which took him away from her. And nothing that she could do brought him nearer. If she tried to bend him by the imperious passion of her own love she wearied him. If she gave way to her temper, as she did not infrequently, she distressed but did not warm him; if she left him to himself he was tranquil and at ease, but he was so much the farther from her, and none the more loving because he was undisturbed. He was sweet and kind and gentle, but he was not loving; and she recognised the difference.

But if he did not love her, whom then did he love? As yet she had not fastened on one for all her sporadic jealousy of all. Still, she could not believe that he was indifferent to every one. He had sworn that nothing but poverty stood between them when he had sought to break his engagement at Palermo—he had sworn it, and he was not a man to lie. But she had begun to doubt him now. He did not love her as she counted love; then it must be that some other held what she had lost. Who was she? If she could discover her!—well, and then? Then, thought Ione to herself, there was Vincenzo within call—Vincenzo who would do her will let it be what it would and who was not a mafiose for nothing. But of all this not a line was sharply defined. She only knew that

she was standing on the edge of an abyss, and that some day she should go over.

Meanwhile, she kept Vincenzo's secret—and her own; in spite of her pride, her reluctance, her fierce disdain, her personal loathing for the man, went constantly to the confectioner's shop, because bidden by its master, who now was also hers, and who set a time of return at each visit; rode out with Edward Formby; and offered herself as a target for all the ill-nature and evil-speaking of Oakhurst.

That riding had become her greatest and indeed her sole pleasure. She was only happy now when going at a hard gallop for miles at a stretch—working off the fever that burnt in her veins in the wild excitement of her rapid going. Edward was too hard a rider himself to stint her passionate pace. The fever was in his veins too; but these long swift rides did nothing towards subduing it. On the contrary, they were the food on which it fed. So the two went about the lanes and over the moor at racing speed; and those who found the thing obnoxious at all found it doubly evil because of the number of miles which were covered in a given number of minutes.

At last rumour grew so loud and condemnation so distinct that Monica, obeying her mother's desire, but certain of predestined failure, undertook the perilous task of preaching prudence to Ione, and some abatement in these long and frequent rides with Edward Formby of Hillside. It was a perilous task and failure was predestined; so far she knew; yet for the wife of Armine St. Claire she was willing to undergo defeat and imperil her own pride in the forlorn hope of doing good for the future, if not for the immediate present.

"There can be no harm where there is no wrong," said Ione, holding up her head like a young queen, when the girl whom her husband loved had very gently advised her to give up these constant and rapid excursions.

"No, of course there is no wrong; but people are so censorious, and we must attend to appearances," said Monica.

"In England? England is a free country!" cried Ione.

"Politically, yes; conventionally, a thousand times no!" answered Monica with a deprecating little smile. "I should say we were far more conventional than even the Italians—at least, about our young married women. Girls are freer."

"So? Then I shall teach you better," said Ione superbly. "In Italy a married woman can do what she likes if her husband does not object. And my husband does not object to my riding with Mr. Formby. On the contrary—he likes it. It takes me off his hands and out of his way," she added bitterly.

Monica turned her eyes to the window and looked out on the ragged and neglected square of ground which represented the garden. Ione's words went into her heart like drops of burning lead. Reading between the lines as she did, what a mournful revelation they gave!

"He cannot wish to get you off his hands or out of his way, dear Mrs. St. Claire," she said after a pause, turning back to Ione with a half-caressing, half-admiring intonation. "You are too charming, and your marriage is too young for that! But is it not just possible that he may be a little hurt and very

proud—foolishly proud?—and that he may not like your being so much with another man, yet will not complain nor object? People are so odd sometimes! and jealousy shows itself in such different ways!”

Ione's nostrils quivered, and her lips drew themselves in a thin hard line.

“Armine jealous of me?” she said scornfully. “That is simple nonsense, Miss Barrington. Were I to be jealous of him—you know that would be more to the purpose!”

She spoke at random, not meaning more than that Monica, like all the world, and as one only of the rest, knew Armine St. Claire's delinquencies, and how much she, this ill-treated Ione, had to suffer.

Monica's quiet face changed as much as colour changes under the flash of light. For a moment she was staggered. How much did Ione know? How much had she divined? Or was it only a chance shot? At the worst there was nothing overt to know; and now, nothing on her side, concealed. It was, however, a moment or two before she quite recovered herself and dared trust her voice. When she did, she said quietly:—

“I know nothing that should make you jealous of your husband; nor does any one else.”

“I want no stranger to assure me of that,” said Ione harshly.

“Have I been impertinent?” said Monica gently.

“Yes, very,” answered the other. “Shamefully insolent—unpardonably. You have taken a liberty I shall never forgive,” she went on, her passion rising with the words—“a liberty no one has ever dared to

take before, and no one but yourself would dare to take now."

"Forgive me," said Monica. "If I have been impertinent, and have taken a liberty, it is only because I know this place, and you do not."

"And why should you be my friend?" asked Ione slowly, her lips narrowed to a thread, her eyes, half closed, leaving only that glittering green line between the lids, her nostrils palpitating, her long white hands clenched one within the other. "I have done nothing that should make you my friend, so devoted as this. Why is it, Miss Barrington?"

"Do you think there is nothing in your position to interest one?" asked Monica. "You are alone here, away from all your own people; your husband's profession leaves you much to yourself; you do not know the peculiarities of the place nor the customs of English society; and your husband has been our friend for some time now. That is why I take an interest in you, and have ventured on a liberty in the hope of being of service to you."

"Because my husband has been your friend for some time?" repeated Ione in the same slow voice, her face not altering, not softening, not relaxing one hair's breadth of its stony viciousness, its bitter suspicion.

"In the beginning, yes," answered Monica steadily. "And now because of yourself."

"I am much obliged to you," said Ione, keeping her glittering eyes still fixed on Monica's pallid face. "But will you understand, this is never to happen again? Never! never! If you wish to keep me as—an acquaintance"—she would not say friend—friend

to a woman who had just confessed to an interest in Armine in those dark years when she, Ione, had not known him? per Bacco, no! She would die rather! —“as an acquaintance, Miss Barrington, will you kindly understand that you are not to interfere in my actions, nor take it on yourself to advise me, no matter what I do, whether I ride every day with Mr. Formby or not, either because you have an interest in me, or have been my husband’s friend for some time? You are very kind, I make no doubt; but I do not care to be advised by my husband’s friends. I prefer my own.”

She spoke with intense insolence, with a mocking accent, and a look of unspeakable bitterness on her face. And as she spoke she rose, as a hint to her visitor to go. Monica rose too.

“I am very sorry, Mrs. St. Claire,” she said. “I confess I have made a mistake, and that I ought not to have taken this task on myself. But I meant it for your good—for an expression of my own sincere interest in you; and if it seems to you an impertinence, I had only the wish to be useful and friendly.”

“Good-morning,” said Ione. Then suddenly changing her voice and manner, she said with extreme complaisance: “But perhaps you would like to stay and see my husband? Pray do so, Miss Barrington, if you like. He will be here presently. Will you not wait to see him?”

“Thank you,” said Monica quite quietly. “I am not ill, and I have nothing to speak to him about. Good-morning, Mrs. St. Claire. Forgive me if I have annoyed you,” she said again, as her last vain endeavour at reparation and peace. “Try to believe I

did not intend to vex you, but quite—quite the contrary.”

Saying which she turned away, with the feeling of one who has aimed high and struck low, and who has made a fatal blunder which nothing now can ever put to rights. And the last thing she saw was Ione's face hardened into scorn and hate and jealous wrath, her proud lip curled and her eyes, now fully opened, with one blazing look of passion turned on her like so much infernal fire.

“Mother was mistaken, and I was weak to yield to her,” said Monica to herself, as she settled herself in the carriage, feeling humiliated, ashamed, and sorry all in one. “And Mrs. St. Claire was right to be offended. It was an impertinence, when one thinks of it; and she is justified in resenting being treated as a child. What business had I to warn or advise her? She is his wife, and that ought to be enough for us as for her. But I am sorry. I am sorry for her—and oh! how sorry for him!”

And of the two, the latter filled her mind more than the former; and the sorrow she felt for Armine was deeper and sadder than that which she felt for Ione—or even for herself, in that she had blundered and brought bale, not blessing, in her train.

Others beside Monica Barrington took it on themselves to remonstrate; and of these Vincenzo was the most forcible. He was madly jealous of this straight-backed, clean-limbed, broad-shouldered young man—this English cicisbeo—who rode instead of danced, and paid his court in the open air instead of in a boudoir. Of the two he hated Edward more than Armine. The one was of the nature of fate while it

lasted, but it was something that death could remove; the other was voluntary and trenched on an available margin. He lost his time. Cousin though he was, this confectioner and local Gull, with her secret in his hand and his blood in her veins, Ione defied his authority and despised his remonstrances. She had no love for the master of Hillside to make her superstitious and timid, as for her husband; and when Vincenzo prophesied disaster to the man who gave her pleasure and gained for her the disfavour of the neighbourhood, she only lifted her chin and said coldly: "It is nothing to me; Mr. Formby can take care of himself."

Still she was secretly disturbed, and not quite so sure of the wisdom of her ways as she had been. Had she been let alone, and that dangerous pride of hers not stirred by unskilful handling, Monica's gentle advice and Vincenzo's ruder warnings might have worked together in favour of prudence; and, under the belief that her own better judgment guided her, she would have practically acknowledged the value of that discretion which each had preached; she would not have confessed to influence, but she would have been influenced all the same, while giving her own common-sense the credit of her action—as the proud always do when they let themselves be persuaded.

But Jane Wintergreen spoilt the better chance. She met Ione one day face to face, and fired off a small salvo of insolence and warning, which hardened the young wife like another Pharaoh, and cut down to the ground all the gentler growths which had just begun to sprout. And the consequence of the interview was that Ione, from the very haughtiness of opposition, on

her next riding excursion four times passed that little house covered with ivy and jessamine, where Miss Wintergreen tyrannised over her maid and took stock of her neighbours; and each time that she passed it she took care to be laughing very hilariously, with her head turned so as to look straight into Edward's face. And when heedless young people do this kind of thing to those who have ill-nature, and the power to use it, what can they expect but hard handling? And Jane Wintergreen's hands were hard when she put out their strength.

Ione had failed to stop the current when she could; and now the waters threatened to overwhelm her; for Jane was virtuous, though also a little venomous, and she made up her mind to speak to Dr. St. Claire himself, and to speak too plainly to be misunderstood. Men at the best were but false gods to her, and flirting was the accursed thing which must not be allowed, come what might.

And like all persons who are going to do ill-natured things, she persuaded herself that it was out of pure charity to that misguided young thing and that her stripes were laid on for reformation, not punishment.

"I say, Dr. St. Claire, look after your wife a little better than you do!" she said abruptly, attacking the question point-blank as her manner was. "Letting her run about the country with a young man like Edward Formby—though he is one of our own, and we know all about him; which we cannot say of every one—and letting her be closeted for hours with a foreigner in a back parlour, as she is with that man who makes cakes and sweets of goodness only knows what!—that's not

the kind of thing we decent English folk approve of; and so I tell you, doctor, as a friend, frankly."

"I am sorry if my wife does anything that seems to you undesirable, Miss Wintergreen," said Dr. St. Claire in his sweet, graceful, but intangible way; a way that made you feel you had no hold on him, and could not really touch him—like a beautiful ice-crystal which melted in your hand, or a mist-wreath on the mountain that dissolved as you came near.

"Undesirable is not quite the word that I should use," said Jane grimly. "I should call it something much plainer than that!"

"Yes? But I confess I do not see any harm in Mrs. St. Claire's riding out now and then with my friend Edward Formby as her escort, when I cannot go with her myself."

Armine spoke with perfect temper and all his best good-breeding.

"Then it would speak better for your common-sense if you did see harm where every one else can see it," returned Jane, even more grimly than before. "Your very confiding husbands are not to my taste, doctor. We homely English bodies would call them by another name, I tell you! When young women are married they should think of something else beside pleasure. They should mind the house and keep to their own firesides, and not be met scouring the country like fly-by-nights a good twenty miles from home! Such goings on! they are not decent; and you are not the man, doctor, to make Oakhurst take to them."

"I am sorry you see things in this harsh light, Miss Wintergreen," said Armine.

"Then if you are, prove it. You have it in your own hands," Jane answered sharply.

"At all events I thank you for your kind intentions," he said in his sweet temporizing way.

"Which I wager anything you will not act on!" returned Jane rudely. "We all know who is master in the doctor's house, and how meek a henpecked husband crows! So good-day to you, doctor, and never say you have not had a good friend in Oakhurst who has put herself out of the way to give you good advice, and keep you and your young lady straight."

And with this she flung the young man a disdainful kind of nod, and strode on her way rejoicing.

For all his graceful acquiescence of manner and virtual intangibility when with Miss Wintergreen, her words left St. Claire as perplexed and disturbed as she herself would have desired. He knew that he did not love Ione, and that he was but a dull companion for her at the best. He knew, too, that he escaped from her society whenever he could with decency, wearied as he was now with her love and now with her jealousy; now with her fiery adoration and now with her consuming wrath. It seemed churlish to deny her a pleasure which was substantially innocent simply because a few narrow-minded and censorious spinsters chose to speak about it. And yet was he not bound to protect that young wife of his against the very least misunderstandings? Was not the delicate bloom of her repute the most sacred of his possessions, and its preservation the most imperative of his duties? And were not appearances all-important in the world—more especially for one who has to live by the good-will of that world?

He was sorry for her. It was a martyrdom and a misery all throughout. But he must do his duty and leave the rest to take care of itself. He worried himself a good deal during the day, but by the time he reached home in the late afternoon he had resolved to bring things to an issue, and to ventilate the matter all through. But it was awkward, all things considered;—especially that loan from Edward Formby, which at the time had been such a boon, but which now—how much he wished he had never taken! How strangely his lines had crossed with Edward's! He remembered how, in the beginning of things, he had heard that Edward and Monica were destined for each other; and how, through doubt and fear, he had come to the conviction that the neighbourhood had proposed and the principals themselves had not ratified. It was Edward, too, who had given him that letter of introduction to the Stewarts by which his whole life had been changed—and those old speculations and impossible dreams for Ione, and his wishes that she could have found a home at Hillside! And now people were beginning to talk of him and Ione; and his money had pulled him, Armine, Ione's husband, through his difficulties. What a strange tangle it was!

"Where did you go to-day, Ione?" Armine asked as he pushed back his chair from the window so that the light should not fall on his face, and spoke with almost more than usual gentleness. It was the instinctive hypocrisy of a gentle nature when an unpleasant duty has to be undertaken.

"To Cross Roads," said Ione, a shade reluctantly.

"All that distance, dear! Cross Roads is full twenty miles away! That is far too long a ride," he returned.

"I found it delightful; not at all too long," she said.

"But these long rides are not good for you. Forty miles—that is excessive!"

"Why are they not good?" she asked with studied indifference.

"They are bad for your health," he answered.

"That is absurd," was her reply. "I was never in such splendid health as I am now. I am as strong as a lioness. If that is your only reason for finding fault with them, Armine, it is nonsense."

"I may have another," he said.

"Yes?"

She spoke in the same studiously indifferent way as before. She seemed to wish to make him understand that his disapprobation touched her no more than the idle whistling of the wind.

"It does not look well to see you going so far and so fast," he said. "People here do not like it, and have spoken of it to me."

"You mean Miss Barrington, or perhaps Miss Wintergreen, by your 'people here,'" said Ione. "And you care for what two old maids like these say! Upon my word, Armine, you are incomprehensible!"

The old Palermo scorn came back over her face. Her fine eyes flashed, her thin lips curved, her transparent nostrils dilated. She was Ione Stewart, fighting fate and defying law, as in the former days; she was no longer the lover of Armine and, to her belief, his beloved.

"Is there anything incomprehensible in my wishing you to be careful, dear, so that people should have nothing to say against you?" said Armine, in-

trenched in the fastnesses of common-sense and conventionality.

"If you had thought for yourself and out of regard for me, I might have attended to you," said Ione. "As the mouthpiece of Miss Barrington and Miss Wintergreen—grazie tante!"

"A thing is right or wrong in itself, Ione. It is not who speaks it, but what it is," said Armine sagely.

"Then you need not trouble yourself," she answered. "There is no more wrong in my riding twenty miles than ten."

"Perhaps I should object to the ten," said Armine.

"That you certainly have no right to do," she answered quickly. "You did not at the first, and you have no right to go back from your word and make new regulations just to please two spiteful old maids. Your Miss Barrington indeed! with her airs of Santa Maria; and that old toad, that Miss Wintergreen! No, Armine; I am not going to have my life regulated by either one or the other!"

"We will not quarrel about names, dear," said Armine, always sweet and gentle, and always wise enough to refuse to take up the glove which she brandished so persistently in his face. "It is I myself who object to it; and I have the right, seeing that things have not turned out quite as I expected."

"What do you mean?" asked Ione quickly. "How have they turned out?"

"By making people talk," Armine answered simply.

"And you care for that!" was her scornful commentary.

"We cannot live without the world's good will," he said. "Certainly you and I cannot, Ione, when our

very bread depends on it. We must attend to appearances on the one hand, and to the prejudices among whom we live on the other. There is no help for it. So, my dear girl, sorry as I am to say it, you must give up these long rides with Edward Formby, and you must not go out with him so often."

"Now you have shown your colours!" said Ione disdainfully. "You confess, then, it is only because of what people say."

"It is because of prudence and wisdom," he answered.

"I do not care now," said Ione, with a mocking laugh. "Your Santa Maria shall have no hand in my life, nor that old zitellone either! Now, Armine, you are answered, and you need say no more."

"I am answered, but not convinced nor conquered," he said. "These rides must be put a stop to. Mr. Formby has good sense if you have not. And now that we are talking, there is another thing I have to speak about. I have heard a strange report of your being so often seen in the back parlour of the confectioner's shop. I cannot understand what it all means. But people are talking of that too; and I am all abroad about it."

"Miss Wintergreen again!" said Ione.

But she rather feigned than felt the disdain she threw into her voice. Her face a little changed, too, in expression, and her eyes had not all the bold candour of opposition that had been in them when she spoke of Edward Formby.

"Never mind whether it was Miss Wintergreen or not," said Armine impatiently. "It is enough to know that I was told you have been watched coming out of

the back parlour, where you had been for hours. It seems to me so strange to hear such a thing of a girl so proud as you; for all that, the man is, I understand, an Italian, and you may like to talk to him in your own language. Still, you—to be on familiar terms with a shopkeeper! It is incredible!”

“What wretches you English are!” cried Ione, in strange agitation. “That odious Miss Wintergreen met me one day coming out of the inner room, where I had been for about five minutes. What a wretch she is!—what an old snake and serpent!”

“But what were you doing there, Ione? In England ladies do not do such things,” said Armine with a kind of fretful dignity.

It was all such a nuisance! such an imbroglio.

“What was I doing? Looking at Vincenzo’s dolci,” she said defiantly.

“Who on earth is Vincenzo?”

“That ugly man you hated so much at Palermo—the superintendent of the mill.”

“That ruffian. What is he doing here?” asked Armine, with the feeling of being suddenly confronted by a nameless kind of danger.

“He is the confectioner,” she said.

“But why has he come here?—here of all places in the world!” he asked again, seriously disturbed.

“Chi lo sa! I am not in his pocket,” said Ione with a hard laugh. “Perhaps to look after me, and protect me from English brigands.”

“Nonsense, Ione! how can you condescend to talk such rubbish? Why did you not tell me he was here?” said Armine with decided temper.

She turned on him like a lioness at bay.

"And why should I tell you that or anything else, Armine?" she said passionately.

"Young wives in general do not keep secrets from their husbands," he said.

"Husbands! husbands! no, not if their husbands care for them!" she returned. "But what do you care for me? nothing! not half so much as you care for Miss Barrington or Miss anybody else! You neglect me, ill-treat me, deny me every trifle, no matter what it is—even a little pleasure which costs you nothing—you treat me abominably, and then you expect that I am to confide in you, and love you, and obey you, as if you were a god and I a little dog! I will do nothing of the kind, Armine. You are not good to me, and I do not see why I should be good to you. And I will not; so now you know."

"My poor Ione!" said Armine with sudden gentleness. "It is hard lines for you, I confess. Debt, poverty, want of society, and misunderstanding—I fore-saw it all; and now it has come!"

"Anything may come if you love me!" said Ione, with an outburst of old passion.

She went over to where he sat, and threw herself on her knees before him.

"Tell me that you love me as much as you did, and then I will do anything for you," she said. Her arms were round him; her face was upturned to his; her dilated eyes were fixed feverishly on him; her heart was on fire; her blood was like burning flame. "I care for nothing in the world, Armine, but you! Tell me that you love me as you used—as you loved me at Palermo."

"I love you, dear, as much as I ever loved you, the

same here as at Palermo," said her husband, kissing her upturned face more sadly perhaps than fervently, more in contrition than for loving need, more to soothe his own conscience than to satisfy his impulse.

A strange spasm convulsed her face.

"How much was that?" she said.

"Silly child! how can you measure love?" he answered, smiling.

"You do not love me, Armine! you never have loved me!" she said, not really believing what she said, but with the wish to be reassured and the spirit of one tempting danger.

"I do not love you when you are silly and doubt me," he said, tenderly smoothing back her hair.

"Do you love me at all?" she asked, letting herself be soothed.

"Of course I do!" he answered with a smile.

"Swear it!"

"I swear it!" he said.

"Better than any one else in the whole world, Armine? Swear it by your hope of heaven, by your faith in God!" said Ione solemnly.

"Why take such sacred names in vain for a mere play?" he answered. "Let it content you, child, that I love you, that you are my wife, and that I am faithful to you in word and deed."

"Who is she?" cried Ione, starting to her feet. "There is some one, Armine—who is it? It is Monica Barrington!"

"Is it?" he said with a rather ghastly attempt at playfulness. "Just think! if it should be!"

"If it is I will find it out—and I will kill her!" said Ione, setting her teeth like a trap.

CHAPTER XV.

MAKING FOR THE ROCKS.

LIFE is a terrible problem! What with contradictory duties, ignorance of the right way, the doctrine of a merciful rod on the one hand and of the father of lies coming before us as an angel of light on the other, we are worse off than belated wanderers in a morass, led by will-o'-the-wisps into folly and by hobgoblins into danger. We have chastisements which we are told are blessings in disguise; and our rosiest apples, which seem made for nourishment and delight, turn out to be but Dead Sea fruit full of bitterness and ashes. It is hard to know how to steer on such a strange phantasmagoric sea; hardest of all to know whom to love and what to leave, or where assent is foolish and where denial is forbidden.

That loan—or gift?—which Edward Formby had made to Armine St. Claire was one of these disappointed contradictions—one of these Dead Sea apples which look like wholesome food and are not fit for man's consumption. In view of all that had been said to him of late, it had made Armine uncomfortable and uneasy; and in view of his own unconfessed, but none the less existing feeling, it had made Edward Formby also uncomfortable and uneasy. The one asked himself: Had he been bribed? He hated himself for the doubt, but there it was, and he could not

get rid of it. If so, what could he do? how should he act? He could not fling back the money into Edward's face. He had spent it, and he might as well try to move the world without a lever as try to replace it. Duelling was out of fashion, and calm reasoning between man and man was scarcely possible on such a matter. The position was difficult, delicate, dangerous; and the young doctor did not see his way quite clearly. He was only conscious of so much—that something must be done.

On his side Edward Formby asked himself: Had he bought a complaisance which would ruin the whole thing, and turn the sweetest friendship he had ever made into one of the most degrading? He, too, hated himself for the doubt; but self-hatred goes for little against suspicion, and the two young men were at this moment distinctly suspicious of each other. So much was due to that loan, which to Armine had looked so like an interposition of Providence when it was made, and which Edward had offered in such simplicity of good faith.

Ione, for all that she knew nothing of this money transaction, was yet as uncomfortable as were the men. She was harassed by Vincenzo, revolted by his insinuations which clung like burning pitch when once made, humiliated by his presence, his knowledge, his relationship, and maddened by jealousy of some unknown rival with her husband. He had always denied it, but she was now morally sure that some one stood between her and Armine; though she was unable to say who that some one was. She only knew it in that blind way in which we are conscious of a presence beside our own in the dark room where we are

shut up. She could not see nor touch; but she knew. She knew also that Edward Formby loved her, and that she could deal with him as she would—make him her husband's scourge and her own avenger if the humour took her or the times were ripe. If she did, she knew also that in the background was always Vincenzo with whom she would have to reckon—Vincenzo, her evil genius incarnate, visiting on her the sins of her parents according to the law. Be that as it would, she held the master of Hillside as a force in reserve—as the Nemesis whom she could command, should the day ever dawn when she must avenge herself on her love. But because she was torn and distracted with doubt and jealousy—with ignorance of how much she had to revenge, and desire to pay back that which was owing, could she but find out what it was—she was uncertain and fitful in her conduct to Edward;—now maddening in her allurements and now as maddening in her repulsion. At times she would not ride with him, would scarcely speak to him, would not look at him, turned from him as if with loathing; then she was like an angel for sweetness and a demon for seductiveness; while Edward, afraid to believe and scarce able to doubt, asked himself, What it all meant? and never came to the true answer. Once or twice he thought that he himself was the cause of all this uncertainty—that she loved him and fought against her passion, but was not able to conquer—when the burden of the “barren honour” that must be preserved rested on him. And, heavy as it was, for her sake it must be borne. He was not singular in thinking himself the cause when he was only the occasion. This too is among those

will-o'-the-wisps by which men are led astray in life and judgment.

Ione was as uncertain in her temper to Armine as she was to Edward. And yet it could scarcely be called uncertainty so much as change and difference. She was cold to him as only those can be whose hearts are burning while their lips are frozen. Days passed, during which she never proffered him a caress, never laid her hand in his, never called him by an endearing epithet, and indeed scarcely spoke to him at all. Yet during this time of frost and snow he used to see her eyes fixed on him with a look that seemed to strike like a whip—a look of passion and reproach and love and sorrow and latent hate all mingled in one, like the litany of her wrongs written in letters of fire.

Then he would take himself to task and resolve on better things. He would be a more attentive companion, a more finished courtier than he had been, to the woman whose only fault towards him was the intensity of her love. All the rest was the mere outgrowth from this central fact, and in justice could not count in the indictment which weariness and want of sympathy made against her. He would conquer his personal shrinking from her, and see her as he saw her at Palermo—beautiful, unfortunate, a living appeal to his compassion, an imperative claim on his admiration. He would shut his eyes to all that was antagonistic to his taste, and accept as if he liked them those fervid demonstrations which chilled and embarrassed rather than warmed and rejoiced him. Checked now, he believed that, at a sign from him, those fervid demonstrations would break out as warmly

as before. It all rested with him. Man-like, he could not doubt his supreme power over the woman who loved him. He had only to beckon with his forefinger and Ione would come back to her devotion, as a well-trained hawk to her lure. He was master of the situation all round; and those borderlands of feeling where opposites mix and mingle did not exist for him. Love was love to him. He could not understand the state of mind where love, transfused with jealousy, becomes hate.

His task of lover-like courtiership was difficult. Marriage, which takes off the edge of romance, sharpens that of uncongeniality; and daily contact deepens the cross-hatching of discord. Pinching shoes must be worn long before they are worn easy; and Armine had not yet trodden his into fitting shape. Nevertheless he would do his best. He would turn over a new leaf, and make himself uncomfortable that he might make her happy.

"I am not busy this afternoon, will you come for a walk with me?" he asked at luncheon one day, after they had been sitting for some time in silence:—Ione, with her mind full of other things and her feet on the edge of an abyss, not seeing and not caring for the disorder of the table and the unappetizing condition of the food which revolted Armine, whose health was too impaired and whose tastes were too refined to bear well with either coarseness in food or disorder in service.

His offer took Ione by surprise. For a moment her strange eyes flashed with pleasure, and a smile broke over her face as a ripple breaks over a sullen mountain tarn. It was only for a moment. Her griefs

against her husband were too deep and many to be lost at his first movement towards her.

"Thank you," she said unpleasantly; "but I am going to the flower-show to-day."

"Oh, I forgot!" returned Armine with a forced smile. "Of course; the flower-show. We will go there instead."

"Together?" she asked with a mocking accent.

"Surely!"

"Really it will be quite odd to go anywhere with you, Armine!" she said, in the same unpleasant and mocking way. "It will be so strange, it will feel almost improper!"

"Little goose!" said Armine, he also with the same forced smile as before.

Ione drew her lips into their thin well-known line, and lowered her eyelids till only a glittering thread was seen between the lashes. Jealous and suspicious, she scented the danger of foreign influence, and did not believe in the integrity of her husband's conversion.

"Who has been speaking to you, Armine?" she asked.

"About what?"

"About me."

"About you? no one."

"Not of your disgraceful neglect of me?" she asked.

"As I do not neglect you, no one could take me to task," he answered very quietly.

She laughed scornfully.

"Not neglect me?" she said. "I do not know a husband in the whole world who treats his wife as

badly as you treat me—who neglects her so entirely. If you say that you do not, you will say anything!”

“Asking you to come to the flower-show is a proof of it, is it not?” he answered, offering the olive-branch in his pleasant, sweet, caressing voice.

“It is a proof that some one has been remonstrating with you, and that you are influenced by some woman whose good opinion you value, not by any care for me!” blazed out Ione.

“Be it so,” said Armine, a little wearily.

To undertake a combat, as well as to fulfil a *corvée*, was beyond his strength.

“Up to now, Armine, I have believed you at least sincere,” said Ione, speaking in the low voice and with the artificial deliberation of strong excitement. “Now I see that you are a hypocrite as well as other things.”

“In that case I need say no more,” said Armine, rising from the table. “If it pleases you, Ione, to think ill of me, I shall not attempt to disturb your enjoyment. You will come to a better frame of mind by-and-by. And I can afford to wait.”

He turned to go, but she put herself between him and the door.

“What have I done to you, Armine, that you should behave to me as you do?” she cried, seizing his wrists. “I have loved you as few girls love even the best and greatest man. I have given up everything for your sake—home and money and happiness and station—all for you. And what has been my reward? Neglect and ill-treatment! You throw me into the way of a man like Mr. Formby, simply that I may go wrong, and then you will get rid of me. You deprive me of every pleasure. You grudge me common necessities—

and all for what? What have I done? How have I deserved it?"

Her voice, which had begun in a low key, had gradually risen into a kind of shriek. Her eyes, which had been fierce and hard, were now still fierce but wild rather than hard. Her passions were rising, as the storm and the tempest rise in the sky and break over the land. She was losing her self-control. In a few moments that and her beauty and her dignity would have gone like flowers on the sand swept away by the tide.

Armine stood there passively waiting for the flood—and then the ebb; while she gripped his wrists with her nervous hands—her fingers closing like steel over his flesh, and her eyes flaming in his face.

"You are mad, Ione," he said, with that kind of contempt which innocence puts on when wrongfully accused. "You take the preoccupations of a profession like mine for neglect, and our common poverty for grudging. I told you at Palermo what you were coming into, and that you would be both poor and lonely. As for your shameful words about Mr. Formby," he went on to say, speaking slowly and impressively; "if I did not take them as the mere ravings of an ungoverned temper—if I thought that you believed in them—I should act on them now this moment, and now and for ever break off all intercourse with him, even to the slightest acquaintance. You make me regret, Ione, that I ever allowed those rides which have borne bad fruit in more ways than one."

"You allowed!" said Ione with supreme disdain.

"Has your husband no rights over your conduct?" he asked.

"No," she answered; "I am my own mistress!"

"And my wife," he said firmly.

"Which does not mean your slave," she retorted.

"Which means that I am master, Ione."

"Mine?" she said, gripping his wrists unconsciously.
"No! never!"

"We shall see when the time comes," he returned.
"But now the question is, are you coming to the flower-show with me or not?"

"Who has told you to ask me?" was her reply.
"You have not done so of your own free will. Who has made you, Armine?"

He shrugged his shoulders in his French way.

"You are too absurd!" he answered.

"But is it not so, Armine?" she asked again, her voice a little rounder, her manner a little less insulting, her eyes a trifle softer, and her nervous hands slipping from his wrists nearer to his palms.

"No," he answered curtly.

"And you have asked me of your own free will?—no one influencing you?"

"How often must I say yes?" he answered. "Who should influence me, Ione? who on earth would or could interfere between man and wife in this way, or induce me to do so small a thing as this?"

"Chi lo sa!" she answered. "Perhaps Miss Barrington!"

Armine's pale face flushed. With an angry gesture he tore his hands from her and turned away.

"You are really too ridiculous to argue with!" he said. "I have not seen Miss Barrington. How should she have influenced me?"

A breath as of flame shot across Ione's face. Her

nostrils dilated, and over her whole being came that strange crouching, penetrating expression of a creature who has found the secret—who has struck the trail. But then she had looked like this before when she had blazed out into jealous wrath and base suspicions about this farmer's wife or that cottager's daughter—about Miss Flora Farley or Miss Rose Chesson—about any and every one who claimed her husband's care and stood between her and her autocratic desire of sole possession.

"Her name disturbs you very much," she said slowly.

"Who would not be disturbed with a wife as insane as you?" he returned angrily. "Your jealousy, Ione, is beyond endurance. It respects no one. You would be jealous of an angel from heaven!"

"No; I am only jealous of a woman on earth," said Ione, in the same slow way as before; "especially of a woman who is too sacred to be spoken of, like this Miss Barrington for instance."

"Are you going to the flower-show or not?" said Armine, suddenly changing front. "Because if you are you had better be thinking of it. I shall have to leave you later in the afternoon."

"You are very anxious about the flower-show, Armine," she said with a sneer. "Whom are you to meet there?"

"I suppose all Oakhurst," he answered with studied indifference.

"Miss Barrington?"

"Probably; and Mrs. Anthony, and Miss Chesson, and every one."

"If I were sure that Mr. Formby would be there I would go," she said, casting her fire in his face.

"Probably he will," was the answer made, quite quietly.

"He is always so kind, so chivalrous, so gentle, and so strong," said Ione, holding up her head. "If you think he will be there, Armine, I will go."

Her husband looked at her with a sudden flash of angry contempt, but he held back his speech. He would not give her the victory she desired.

"Are you coming or not?" he repeated.

"To meet Mr. Formby? Yes, I think I will," she said, with an insulting laugh.

"No," said Armine, holding her back as she was passing him; "to go with me, Ione, not to meet Mr. Formby."

"You are going to meet Miss Barrington," was her rejoinder. "We shall be only quits."

"In that case we had better stay away altogether," said Armine.

"You may do as you like," she said. "I am going, with or without you. It does not signify to me whether you accompany me or not. I am going for my own pleasure, not yours. Do you understand?"

And with this she thrust him aside, with an action which was essentially a blow, as she went upstairs to dress for the local fête.

Armine sat down by the table and laid his face on his crossed arms, like a man weary with the fight. Scenes of all kinds were abhorrent to him—as abhorrent as every sort of violence, of exaggeration, of excess. Between Ione's fervid love and frantic jealousy, her wild caresses and wilder wrath, he felt that all the peace and sweetness, all the delight and dignity of life were lost. His only sense of rest was when

she was sullen and moody, as she had been of late; and this was but the lull before the storm. Truly the chain and bullet of his servitude weighed heavily on him, and he could neither lighten the weight nor free himself from the fetter. He knew that Ione had what is called a stronger character than he—that is, she had a more determined will, a more resolute way. He was too peace-loving to be wilful, too sensitive to be resolute. He would give in for the sake of peace, also not to hurt another; but she would strive to the end and get her will, if she had to slay her love in the process.

Wearily thinking of the whole bitter mistake of his life, wishing that the end was near and that, without cowardice, he could pass through the gate which gives no backward swing, he sat there as in a dream of pain, when Ione returned, dressed and ready. Her heart was touched when she saw him in this attitude of speechless misery. She thought it was because of her—her cruelty and wickedness. And, because she was still in love, her victory and its results made her tender and repentant.

She went up to him softly and laid her hand on his shoulder.

“What is the matter?—are you ill, Armine?” she said, stooping so that her cheek touched his.

He started and looked up. His face looked ill enough, haggard and white as it was, and with those mournful eyes, dry and fixed, where it would have been less pathetic to have seen tears.

In a moment her arms were round him, and she held him to her breast.

“My darling! my darling!” she said passionately;

"do not mind what I said! I was angry. I do not know what I did say; but I love you, Armine—you know that I do—you, only you! Darling! my beloved! you are all my life to me!"

She covered his pale face with kisses—brow, lips, and cheeks, those mournful eyes, the very curls on his head—she kissed them all; her lips like fire, her strong young arms clasping him to her heart, her imperious personality enveloping and overpowering him, her love surging like a sea in her soul and breaking like a storm in her caresses.

A shiver passed over Armine. It was peace he wanted, not passion; the gentle harmonies of affection, not these tropical outbursts, now of demoniacal fury and now of delirious love—outbursts wherein was no sense of peace, no form of dignity.

"I know, I know, my dear," he said gently. "And I dare say you are often sorely tried, poor girl!" he added, with a tender kind of sigh. "But I never mean to make you unhappy, Ione."

"You are an angel!" said Ione with passion. "I love you! I love you! you do not know how much I love you, Armine!" she added, kissing his throat. "Some day you will!"

"When you have killed me?" he said with a sad little smile.

"When I have died for you!" she answered fervently.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE FLOWER-SHOW.

It was the last flower-show of the year at Oakhurst, and every one made it a point of honour to go, while all who could sent something to help in the general display. The ground was crowded with people and the tents were filled with produce. The great people contributed their hothouse grapes and peaches, their pines and melons; the farmers sent turnips and potatoes, beets and monster ears of corn; and a special plank was set apart for nosegays of leaves and grasses, berries and late autumn flowers, by which the cottage children were to be taught perception of colour and form. So that the whole thing was arranged with as much perfection as could be compassed in a place like Oakhurst, where the magnates could be counted on the fingers and the groundlings were as the hairs of the head in comparison. There was a band of music too, of rather wild notions in the way of time and tune; and there was a Punch and Judy show for the little ones; and some of the toilettes were things to behold and wonder at—the satisfaction of the wearers being always exactly proportioned to the extravagance thereof—so that Oakhurst was altogether having a good time, and enjoying itself to the nth.

In the madness of her late moody displeasure against her husband, Ione had written to Edward

Formby, appointing a time and place where to meet him at the show. She cared nothing for the consequences. If by trailing his name and her own self-respect through the mire she could provoke Armine, pain him, sting him, agonize him, she would, no matter what the end might be. Young as she was, she knew the peril in which she had voluntarily placed herself and how she was emphatically playing with fire. She was conscious how her safety lay in Edward's regard for her purity, and how, when she ceased to respect herself, all the rest would go by the board. But this was as chaff before the wind in the fever of her wrath; and she counted the shame of her self-degradation a mere nothing if by that she could revenge herself on her husband.

Now, however, when this fervid reconciliation had edged out her former bitterness, Edward was of no more importance to her than so much thistledown in the air. So she was well with her husband, the man whom she loved; and all the rest was valueless.

Radiantly beautiful; dressed in her favourite colours of old-gold and cream; queenly, proud, elated, superb, and cruel to the discarded as the loving ever are when reconciled to the beloved, Ione passed through the gate, with Armine by her side, and went straight to the central tent, where she knew that Edward Formby must have been waiting for her for at least half an hour. He had been waiting for more than that time. For a full hour, his impatience going before the clock, the master of Hillside had been standing sentinel among the dahlias and china-asters, afraid to stir, lest Ione should come in at one entrance while he went out at another. In which case he should certainly lose

five good minutes of her society. And five minutes taken from the contemplation of Ione's face were as five ages to Edward Formby, her husband's friend and benefactor.

Up to this day he had meant no harm by this devotion to another man's wife. Such things can be with men of his character. He was one of those honest unconscious souls who live only in the present and blink, owl-eyed, at the future; striding down the decline which leads to Avernus without knowing that they have left the level path. He meant no harm and he foresaw no danger—because he foresaw nothing of any kind. He only knew that the hours spent with Ione St. Claire were hours of unalloyed happiness; that to-day was blessed and to-morrow had to come.

She had brought a new sensation into his life and had led him through a new experience. The seductions of those Birds whose home is in the Wood he knew; the sincere and passionless affection of a brother for a sister, in his relations with Monica, that also he knew; but this deep and tremulous passion, at once respectful and absorbing—this love which exalted womanhood into something sacred, and protected his ideal from his own desire—this chivalrous devotion which asked only to serve and did not seek to be rewarded—which was content to pay its homage in the daylight, and to hide away its hope for the dreams of the night—this was new to him; and, like a boy, he cherished his secret treasure without asking himself whether it were lawfully his or no.

He never asked himself anything about Ione. He trusted the future ordering of things to chance and the instincts of an English gentleman. These had stood

him in good stead hitherto: why not now? And yet, since that loan, in spite of himself his thoughts had travelled into a new path, and his relations with the St. Claires seemed somehow changed. His obligations to Armine were fewer; the right to serve Ione was stronger and closer.

People had heard about this loan. Made by cheque, as it had been, it was sure to creep out in a country-place where secrets are public property and the most astounding fictions are those which are based on facts. And, of course, having leaked out as it had, this friendly little transaction, which had been made in such thorough kindness and good faith, had put on an appearance as far removed from the truth as if the gossips had granted horns to a lion and hoofs to a dove. It was assumed to have been an infamy. Talk to them of kindness pure and simple between man and man, and a loan made without consideration of interest and no chance of repayment—were we in Arcadia? No one out of romances does such a thing as this; and Edward Formby was not an Arcadian, nor was Dr. St. Claire the hero of a romance! Wherefore, there must be more here than met the eyes; and that more was necessarily bad.

So they argued, as ignorant suspicion argues all the world over; and when Ione and her husband came into the tent where Edward Formby had been standing sentinel among the dahlias and china-asters, for a good hour by the clock—standing with that unmistakable look of watching on his face which shows expectancy and gives leave to presuppose an assignation—a small crowd gathered round to note how things would go.

“Look at her, that young hussy, that young fly-by-

night!" said Miss Jane Wintergreen, in rather loud tones, as Ione entered the tent, like some queen clad and crowned with gold. "Our Mr. Formby has been waiting for her. I'll wager my head they had an assignation!"

But her fidus Achates, Rachel Major, to whom she spoke, besought her in a terrified whisper to lower her voice in the first place, and, in the next, not to think evil of a neighbour—for she was as sure as sure that their Mr. Formby could not be so wicked. A married woman!—whatever should he want with waiting for a married woman!

"Devilry," said Jane emphatically.

On which Rachel said, with quivering fidelity: "If I were to be torn to pieces by wild horses, Jane, I'll never be made to believe that!"

Still, even she could not help seeing that Edward's face changed unmistakably when the two entered and he went forward to meet them. The truth was he had expected Ione to come alone, and he had not reckoned on Armine; and just at this moment—handsome, interesting, charming as Armine was, he would rather have seen the foul fiend than him.

The turbulent scene through which she had just passed had left its mark on Ione. Electric and alive at all points, she had more than ever of that strange power which made her all men's desire and almost all women's aversion. Insolent and superb, she looked as if she despised and defied the whole world, and trod under foot both their friendship and their enmity. Even Edward, who was to have been her avenger, was now no more to her than a discarded serf; and the knowledge of how she had played on him for her own

use—now tossing him a grace and now snatching from him a hope—helped the proud antagonism to all life and humanity which possessed her at this moment. Mistress of herself and fate, she stood as a queen, supreme in beauty, in command, in power; and, hated or loved, all had to confess that she was for the time the pinnacle and apex of social interest in Oakhurst.

But if she stood there as a queen, it was as a queen smitten with leprosy. Clad in her royal robes, crowned with her golden diadem, bearing her sceptre in her right hand, hung round with the glittering insignia of her state, as it might be, she was nevertheless shunned by all. The watching crowd watched still, but gradually edged away, leaving a clear space for her, Edward Formby, and Armine. The two men were evidently embarrassed one with the other, though they made efforts to appear quite friendly and at ease; while Ione, between the two, was insolent to the one because satisfied with the other. Her bird had come back to her hand, not she to her lure; and the whole wide world was concentrated in Armine and her love.

While they were standing there talking by themselves, Monica and Theodosia came into the tent by a side opening.

"Those shameless people!" said Theodosia angrily. She too had heard of that loan, and her interpretation had run on all fours with Jane Wintergreen's. "Monica, you surely are not going to speak to them in a public place like this!" she added, as she saw her sister-in-law with a kind smile on her face turn towards them as if intending to join them.

"Why not?" asked Monica.

"After all that has been said?—impossible!" said Theo.

"I know nothing that should prevent my speaking to Mrs. St. Claire—and her husband," retorted Monica gently.

"That creature!—standing there and making eyes at Edward Formby; and her husband, who has been bought over, looking on?—Monica, have you no sense of dignity or propriety?"

"I do not think I am wanting in either because I speak to friends, against whom neither you nor I know anything, Theo. What we hear is another matter. I for one do not believe all I hear."

Her gentle persistence, very mild in manner and quite immovable in substance, seemed to irritate Theodosia more than a more passionate opposition would have done.

"If you do go and speak to them I shall think you are bewitched—or worse; as bad as she is, or so infatuated about him that you do not care what you do so long as you may be near him," said Theodosia in angry whisper. "See! not a person in the place is speaking to them. Look at the Lanes and the Martyns and the Waltons—no one takes the least notice of them—not even their own set, the Chessons and the Farleys. They are cut publicly, and I do not wonder at it. Monica, you shall not go—I declare I will go up to them and tell them what I think if you do!"

"If they are cut as you say, Theo, that is all the more reason why I should go," said Monica, quite gently but very firmly; "and why you should come too, Theo."

"I? No! not I!" answered Theo bitterly. "I have too much respect for your brother's name, Monica, to degrade it in this way. I remember what I owe to him and myself rather better than you do."

"I respect both my brother and my name best when I do what is right and do not do what is wrong," rejoined Monica. "And it is wrong to go with the crowd in this undeserved slight on innocent people. So I shall go and speak to them."

And with this she made her way through the ranks and stands of flowers and fruit, and walked quietly to where the three stood by the dahlias and the china-asters.

Armine had the professional man's habitual self-command and facial control; but he could not so entirely govern himself as not to show more than the mere conventional politeness of an ordinary acquaintance, when he saw, coming up to them alone, with so much sweet and gentle friendliness, the only woman whom he had ever loved, and who represented to him all that was most desirable in womanhood and most delightful in humanity. Something came into his face which flashed back a lurid light on Ione's, and, for the second time to-day, she had that strange look of a creature that has found the scent and hit the trail.

Why should Monica come up to them in this marked manner, while Mrs. Anthony stood apart, her vivacious little face aflame and her sparkling black eyes so full of malice and disdain? And why should Armine look as he did? He said nothing, truly, and he did nothing that might not have been said and done by any one in the place, without calling forth remark or betraying intention. Still, he looked; and

the eyes are traitors where all the rest of the features keep counsel. Yes; it was Monica Barrington who stood between her and her beloved. It was Monica whom Armine loved; and Monica loved him. It came before her with the flash of a sudden illumination. Fool that she had been not to have seen it before! But the punishment was ready, and the whip of scorpions was lying close to her hand.

It was a painful moment for all concerned, save Monica; and she, the unconscious pivot on which everything was turning, was full only of kindness for each:—believing in Edward's integrity, and wishing to prove that she did; pitying Ione's isolation and false position, and therefore desirous to pay her publicly as much attention as she would have paid to any other person of her own degree; and full of sorrow for Armine—to whom, however, she wanted to show only the ordinary courtesy of ordinary friendship, not confessing that any cause for special sympathy existed at all. But though it be an angel's wing which fans the fire, the powder magazine will be reached at last; and the song of a seraph can bring down an avalanche all the same as the cry of a boor. And the suspicion of a jealous woman is as the fire burning close to the powder magazine, and the avalanche trembling on the mountain-side.

After she had watched her husband for some time, and read in his face more than it revealed, Ione turned abruptly to Edward Formby, still standing there doing his best to strangle his disappointment and accept the situation with serenity, but not succeeding quite to his satisfaction.

"Will you come with me to the other tents?" she

said hardily, flashing the full light of her glorious eyes on him and smiling with studied sweetness as she spoke. Her smile was forced; the brilliancy of her eyes was artificial and made up; the allurements which she threw into her face was a mere trick of the muscles; her voice, never musical, was deeper and more dissonant than usual; and her nervous hands played restlessly with the handle of her parasol. Edward Formby saw none of all these signs of a mind ill at ease, and a woman's grace to one man masking a woman's torture because of another. He was simply delighted that she had asked him to go with her. It was in some sort a salve for his mortification.

"What is there to see?" asked Armine, to include himself.

"Some very charming wild-flower bouquets in one, and some really fine fruit in the other," said Monica, looking at Ione, who, still smiling boldly into Edward's face, did not look back at her.

"Yes, let us go," said Edward, partly dense and partly charmed.

Armine was cautious of rocks ahead and dangers of which he had to beware. Ione's strange vibration of manner; the patent coldness and something worse of the crowd; Monica's evident desire to be more than ordinarily kind and to throw the ægis of her name and repute about them in their isolation; Edward Formby's embarrassment; the consciousness of his own indebtedness, and now, the growing fear of the motives which had made his friend so generous—not Ione's sudden illumination brought more pain to her than his thoughts brought to him, as he smiled with

the forced smile of society and good-breeding, and made believe that nothing ailed him nor his.

The four gathered into a little knot and turned to leave the tent; and the crowd fell back as they passed, as if they were indeed smitten with leprosy. Even Monica's saintly repute did not protect her from blame in associating herself thus publicly with the discarded of the day, and all either looked askance or turned aside altogether to avoid them. Only Rachel Major came timidly forward, and for the first time in her life offered her hand to the master of Hillside. It was her poor little faithful protest, and her brave act of adhesion and advocacy.

"I was so sorry, Mr. Formby, to keep you waiting!" said Ione as they turned away.

She had pointedly and resolutely separated herself from her husband and Monica. She would not let Monica walk with her, as this last had wished and endeavoured to do, but had taken Edward Formby to herself, while consigning her husband to Miss Barington in that unmistakable way which includes a contest if it be not accepted.

An apology from Ione was one of those strange variations in the main theme of a character for which no one is prepared—one of those variations which break up the most compact theories and demand a new alphabet for the book of the soul.

"You are very good," said Edward, a troubled kind of radiance in his eyes. "I began to fear you were not coming."

"After I had promised you?" she said with flattering reproach. "That was not like me!" After a

pause, as if to better emphasize her words, she added: "Nor what I should have done to you at any time!"

"I am glad to hear that," he said, his voice a little unsteady. "I did not think you would have ever done anything special for me."

"No?" She turned her eyes on him with one of her strange flashing looks—turning so that Armine and Monica should see her face. "How little you know me!" she said; and then, with the same flattering accent of reproach, she added: "I thought you understood me better than this, by now!"

"Sometimes I think I do; and then something happens and I am all abroad again," said Edward in his literal straightforward way.

"You are certainly very much abroad if you doubt my—how shall I call it?—my affection for you," said Ione boldly.

"Have I really a place in your affections?" asked Edward in a low voice, pretending to examine some fruit which he did not see, and steadying himself against the bench as he spoke.

She glanced back at her husband. He was talking to Monica Barrington and not looking at the show.

"A place?" she asked. "What would you say if I told you—all?"

"That I love you—better than my life," he answered.

His large hand trembled like a girl's, his handsome ruddy face was illumined with a sudden glory like a god's—but a god suppliant for all his power, subdued for all his strength. "Do you love me, Ione? can you?" he asked.

His voice and words sobered her. She was using

him for her revenge, not for her pleasure—indifferent whether she made him suffer or not, so long as she could make him the scourge for her griefs.

“No,” she said, taking herself back like a bow suddenly relaxed. “I do not love you, Mr. Formby; I love *him*.”

For a second time she turned and looked at her husband; and, as she looked, Monica struck her foot against one of the supports of the benches and slightly sprained her ankle.

There was no cry, no exclamation on either side, as Armine sprang forward to help her; there was only one rapid look passing like light between them;—one brief word from him to her; a gentle little smile of gratitude from her to him. But it was enough. That look burnt into Ione’s brain, and for the moment she did not know where she was, nor what had happened, nor what was going to happen. All that she was conscious of was that she was in a storm—it seemed to her a storm of the elements. The throbbing pulses beating in her ears were like the waves of the sea dashing against the sides of the tent—the fiery stream of hate and anguish and passion and jealousy traversing her brain and flashing in her eyes were like lightning darting through the skies—the dark sense of infinite despair was like some dreadful eclipse, where the sun was blotted out and all nature was dead. She was recalled to herself by hearing her name spoken in Italian, as Vincenzo stood bareheaded before her. He was her Thought taken shape and form—he should be her avenger on the one side; and on the other—was not Edward there as her own translated Revenge?

The rich scents of the fruit heaped up on the

benches were stimulating and intoxicating. The wide nostrils of Vincenzo seemed to draw them in like food, like wine—or as a wild beast draws in the scent of blood. His glittering eyes were full of fire; his face was instinct with that passionate sense of life which is so near to cruelty; and yet, as he stood there bare-headed, he smiled and was good-natured and careless and complaisant, according to his race and nation; ready for a smile, a caress, or a crime, as it might chance—a mafiose for the one part, a devoted friend for the other, a lover to the death, and an enemy as intense as a lover.

No one knew what he said to Ione, and no one knew what she answered back to him. They spoke in Sicilian, and their speech isolated them. But she did not say what he, knowing all, had expected her to say. She did not order him to kill those two who loved each other, to her shame and hurt. Still, he said to himself: “It will come. She will come to me at last, and I shall hold her in my hand as she held the dead bird at the mill.”

“Shall we go into the open air?” asked Monica, who had turned deadly white. “I find this tent so stifling, and my ankle hurts me a little. Will you give me your arm, Edward?”

Ione turned from her rudely.

“No, stay with me, Mr. Formby,” she said imperiously. “I think I shall call you Edward, like all the rest,” she added, with a harsh laugh.

“Do,” returned Edward, who indeed could say no less.

“My husband can take Miss Barrington,” continued Ione, with an evil smile and a mocking accent as she

said these words "my husband," once the dearest of all to her, now the most painful. "Armine, take Miss Barrington," she went on to say, not looking at him and speaking with intense insolence. "I will stay here."

"I will certainly take Miss Barrington," said Armine, offering his arm to Monica, who took it because she was no longer able to stand alone; "but I wish you to come too, Ione. This tent is too close for you."

"I intend to stay here," said Ione. "You are happier without me and I am happier without you. Go," she said angrily. "Do you want me to make a scene, Armine, and turn you out of the tent by force?"

Monica looked at Ione as she might have looked at something strange and changed. That pale face, those burning eyes, those quivering nostrils, that cruel mouth, this infinite insolence and unrestrained anger—what did it mean? with Vincenzo standing there bare-headed, smiling, looking from each to each with glittering eyes and wide flat nostrils, drinking in the heavy scents of the fruits like wine—or blood.

She turned to Armine, and her old love came back on her heart, like a flood breaking through the crust of self-control and the barrier of circumstances; but it came back as pity, not passion; as sorrow for him, not disappointment for herself; as infinite and endless and fruitless sympathy with suffering she could not soothe, and must not even confess that she knew. And then, overpowered by all these influences—by moral pain and physical suffering, her blood chilled by fear and horror of what she saw, and her senses sickened by the heavy scents of the fruits—she swayed forward, and was caught fainting in Armine's arms.

"No," said Ione, laying her hand on Edward's arm as he stooped to help Armine in carrying Monica to the outer air. "Stay here with me. Vincenzo, take the Signorina outside. Armine has deserted me for her," she continued to Edward. "It is only fair you should remain with me."

"Let us all go," said Edward, in profound agitation.

"If you do, never speak to me again!" said Ione in a low voice. "Stay with me now and I am yours—leave me, and—Buona notte! Those two love each other—let them go. And we will keep together!"

"For ever!" said Edward Formby, feeling as if he had killed a child, and conscious that the instincts of an English gentleman, to which he had trusted, had deserted him in the hour of need.

"To-morrow," said Ione, giving him her hand.

She shuddered as she spoke, but she did not take back her fatal word. On the contrary, she repeated it, not looking into his face.

"To-morrow. Take me from Oakhurst and all it holds, for ever!—for ever!"

"Now," he said feverishly.

"No; to-morrow," she returned.

She wanted the interval to gloat over her coming revenge. To strike so swiftly would be merciful; and she had no mercy in her heart—only cruelty, and that self-torturing desire to torture which springs from jealousy and vitiated love.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN HER MADNESS.

THE dinner had passed in unbroken silence. Armine had the feeling of a man who is battling for dear life against fearful odds, and Ione was still dangerous and disturbed. Certainly she had made a slight return on herself, which might grow into repentance or might come to nothing. Of her own free grace she had looked back on the better way she was leaving, and it was just possible that, the angel of her soul conquering the demon now possessing it, Edward Formby would be once more thrown over, and her whip of scorpions laid aside. But also it was just as possible that she would go on just as she had begun, and punish her husband by degrading herself and besmirching Monica Barrington's repute.

For all the world should know the reason why she had left Armine, she said to herself. She would not be the only one to suffer—he and that serpent should suffer with her; and in the shipwreck that had to come they should all go to the bottom together. Still, there was a certain renovation, a certain reinfusion of love for this man whom she was planning to destroy, which was acting as a slight anodyne to her jealous wrath and disposing her to better things.

Words were dead between them, but Ione's eyes took up the tale, and her brief glances were some-

times full of the old eager love; sometimes soft with a woman's desire for pardon and reconciliation; though again dark with her new-born hate, and small and green and glittering as a snake's with her jealous fears. Of those two sitting dumbly there, it was hard to say which was the more miserable, the more oppressed; for, granting all the initiative of evil to lie with jealousy—granting that it is this jealousy alone which causes the pain—that result of pain is equally divided, and “what they inflict they feel” is only too true a word!

Still wearing her old-gold coloured dress, still electric and alive at all points, Ione was looking supremely lovely; but her beauty had ceased to attract Armine. He scarcely now recognized even its artistic value, associated as it was with so much moral suffering and discord. His had lost none of its power over her. And how handsome he was to-night, with that dead-white skin and curling raven hair, and those large soft eyes, with their sweeping lashes like a girl's, and that strange look of stillness and determination on his face! He was like a God in pain for wilful humanity; his divinity untouched for all his pain—sorrowful and desolute in one. How beautiful he was! how good and sweet and gentle! and, in spite of all her wrath and madness, how passionately she loved him! But no other woman should love him! She held him—she possessed him; he was hers, hers only; and rather than let another share even in her love for him, she would——

Again she thought of Vincenzo, a mafiose, her cousin, the man who loved her and who for love would do her will. It was well to have such devotion at her back! She might need it; who knows?

The dinner was of a better character to-day than usual. For his own pleasure Vincenzo had supplied it as his gift, and it had quite a holiday air. It was the completion of the festa according to him; and it pleased him to think that Ione ate well to-day at his expense. But it dragged; and for all its delicacy Armine scarcely ate at all. He had no appetite, and he was suffering in body as well as in mind. The first fogs and damps of autumn had found him out, and his chest was aching as it had ached last year, before that fatal illness which had necessitated that still more fatal voyage to Palermo.

A fire was burning in the grate, and the red glow of the flame mingled with the whiter shine of the lamp and made the shabby room look radiant.

The dinner was over and had been removed; only the dessert was left. Grapes and peaches and heavy scented melons, wine and hothouse flowers from Hill-side, with luscious sweets of various kinds from Vincenzo, made a table elegant to luxuriousness; and as the moments flew by, the young wife felt herself carried farther and farther from her wicked outbreak, and nearer to the blessed peace of loving reconciliation. If only Armine would look at her!—if only he would not keep his eyes so resolutely from her face!

The glowing flame of the fire leaped high in the grate, and struck the glass on the table with its burning red reflections, so that the faceted points glittered like rubies, while the golden wine was shot with lines which looked like streaks of blood. It played on the sheeny surface of Ione's gown and dyed the shadows of the folds with crimson. It glanced on the edges of her hair and touched that too with its burning bright

reflections, which mingled the suggestion of blood with the colour of gold. Everywhere was this suggestion of blood streaking the colour of gold—while the stimulating scents of the fruits and the intoxicating perfume of the hothouse flowers carried on the impressions of to-day within the tents, and threw back the memory to Palermo. Everywhere was this strange contradiction and commingling of strife and love, of poverty and riches, of the present and the past—and the advancing shadow of the future like dread footsteps stealing nearer and nearer to the door.

Sitting there with the look of a man in the thick of the fight, hardly pressed, but holding his own and resolute to do his best, Armine thought how he should open the discussion which had to come. It was a pity that there should be one as the coda to this lighter theme; but it was due to his own dignity, to his repute, to their standing in the world, to the possibility of mutual esteem at home. She was young, ignorant, wilful, extreme; he had been warned to keep her in due subjection; and he was in his right as her husband to control her. This question of Edward Formby must be put on a practicable footing. As things were, it was essentially impossible.

"I must have some talk with you, Ione," said Armine, speaking slowly, as he turned his chair sideways to the table, facing the fire and sitting in a kind of three-quarter way to her—neither in profile nor full front.

"It is pleasant to hear your voice. You have been so long silent," said Ione in return, as if nothing were between them save the ordinary matters of life, and as though the conversation that was to come would touch

no deeper theme than the flower-show of to-day or the visits of to-morrow.

"You must tell me what you mean," he continued, still not looking at her. "Things have come to a pass where they cannot continue, and you have compelled me to take matters into my own hands."

"Yes?" she said. "What matters? The house-keeping? You are quite welcome, Armine! I make a wretched manager, I know, but I cannot do better. The servants are so bad! But you have had a nice dinner to-day, have you not?"

"It is not the housekeeping," he said. "It is something much more important."

"Yes?" she repeated. "By-the-by," she added rapidly, as if to prevent his return, "how is Miss Barrington's ankle? Was it sprained?"

"Yes," said Armine curtly.

"Badly?"

"Quite bad enough."

"That faint was real?" she asked, with well-acted interest.

"What else should it have been?" he answered a little contemptuously.

"Oh! it might have been put on," said Ione quite amiably as to manner, but those narrowed lids!—those dilated palpitating nostrils!—and the cruel working of the curves about her lips! "Girls do those things sometimes, especially when they like the man who will take them in his arms and hold them close to his heart—close—close—as you did Miss Barrington to-day. For a saint, as you all say she is, I must say this Monica of yours is wonderfully fond of another woman's husband!" she added with an insulting laugh.

"Because you think this, did you behave as you did to-day with Mr. Formby?" asked Armine.

"I behave!—how did I behave?" was her defiant reply.

"I scarcely like to characterise your conduct, Ione. Disgracefully is the only word that I can find," he answered.

"If I did act disgracefully, Armine, then I was only like yourself," she said. "You were disgraceful, if you like; but I was not!"

"What then would you call your extraordinary behaviour to Mr. Formby, and still more extraordinary insolence to Miss Barrington and myself?" he returned angrily.

"You and she tied in one string together—how pretty!" said Ione with a harsh laugh.

"Because you treated us both alike," said her husband. "You force me to connect myself with her because you forced me to be with her."

"That shows my sweet disposition," replied Ione, with again that harsh laugh and insolent disdain of manner. "You had eyes only for her, so I thought you had better have as much of her as you liked. Only—caro mio—you have to pay for your festa. Do you understand, Armine?—we all pay for our festas, and you have to do like the rest."

"No, I do not understand," answered Armine. "I only know that you are utterly unreasonable and uncontrollable, in more ways than one."

"Unreasonable? Good! Unreasonable in what, Armine?"

"In your jealousy, for one thing."

"Jealousy of Monica Barrington, for instance?"

"Yes, of Monica Barrington," he replied; and as he said this he turned to his wife full face and looked at her straight between the eyes.

"That saint! that dear, delightful, charming saint! That serpent, you ought rather to say!" exclaimed Ione, passing from taunt to fury with the rapidity of lightning.

"I will not hear her spoken of disrespectfully," said Armine sternly.

"Is she so sacred as this? She is not to be spoken of like any other person! You admire her so much as all that! You do admire her, Armine, do you not? You admire her excessively—freckles, washed-out eyes, and all?"

"Yes, I do admire her, and I esteem her as much as I like her," said Armine. "So should you, Ione, if you had either gratitude or common sense, for she has been your best friend here ever since you came. But I want to speak of Mr. Formby, not of Miss Barrington," he added. "That is the subject between us at this moment."

"And I want to speak of Miss Barrington," retorted Ione. "Miss Barrington who is the cause of all the rest—Edward Formby and all. And I do not want her friendship, Armine. She is your friend, not mine."

"If mine, she is yours," he said.

"No, if she is yours she cannot be mine," flashed out Ione. "I will not have her friendship. She is a wicked woman—a bad, wicked wretch—and I will never let her enter my house again."

"You need not be afraid. I should say she never would come here again," said Armine.

"She shall not. It is my house, and I can say

what women come to see me or not. And she shall not—never! never! I will never shake hands with her again; and next Sunday at church I will tell her before all the world what I think of her, and what a wicked, abandoned, shameless creature she is!”

Her passion rose as she went on, growing with that terrible strength of self-feeding and self-consuming jealousy.

“You are mad,” said Armine contemptuously.

“Because I do not love your mistress and will not receive her like my sister?” she said.

He turned from her with a shudder. His sole feeling for her at this moment was one of unutterable abhorrence, of loathing, of contempt.

“Your mistress,” repeated Ione. “You know she is, Armine. You know you love her,” she said, bending forward her supple body in its gold-coloured dress—that supple body a little rounder than of old, a little changed in line and contour, but still lithe and soft and supple and flexible. As she spoke she laid her cheek on her hand, assuming a listening attitude—curved, beautiful, mocking, demoniacal. “Tell me the truth, caro mio,” she went on to say. “You love her, do you not?”

“Love her!” cried Armine, but his voice had in it an accent of despair rather than of deprecation.

The glittering line between those narrowed lids shone with more and more evil lustre; the curved body, soft and flexible, suggested more and more closely the idea of a snake preparing to strike—or it might be some tawny soft-footed lioness preparing to spring.

“Yes, tell me the truth, caro mio,” she repeated.

"You love this English miss—this pale-faced saint who is the mistress of another woman's husband—my devoted friend who has stolen from me all I had in the world—the heart of the man I loved. You hear, Armine? I say loved. There is a difference, you know. I cannot say love, because I do not love you any longer. I did; but I do not now. I will not share my husband with Miss Barrington. I prefer to keep my own things to myself."

She stopped, still looking at her husband, who looked into the fire and kept silence.

"You love her, dear, do you not?" then said Ione after a short pause. "You find her beautiful and charming? infinitely more beautiful than I am? infinitely more charming altogether? She would have made you such a nice wife, Armine. Why did you not marry her, dear? Why did you come to Palermo and choose me?—I who am so immeasurably her inferior! You do love her, Armine, do you not?—this nice, kind, beautiful Miss Barrington—this pale-faced saint of Oakhurst!"

"Yes," said Armine, turning suddenly round and looking full into Ione's face. "I did love her, Ione. She is the one perfect woman in the world for me, and the one for whose esteem and friendship I care the most."

"Then you lied to me in the garden that day at Palermo?" said Ione. "Faithless to her—a liar to me—you give yourself a good character, Armine!"

"Let the past alone," he said. "I did love her once; but I am none the less your faithful husband—none the less desirous to be your friend and protector, and to make your life as happy as I can."

"You love her?" said Ione slowly, keeping exactly the same attitude and expression.

"I loved her," he repeated.

"To my face, Armine, you say this? You dare to confess it?" she said.

"Yes, to your face," he replied steadily. "Why should I not?"

She opened her eyes to their fullest. They were like two living orbs of fire, blazing as the fire in the grate blazed and burnt. She sprang to her feet and raised both her hands high in the air. There was a crash, a cry, a heavy fall:—and then she was kneeling by the hearth, her husband's lifeless body lying prone across her lap. All around lay the glittering fragments of broken glass, and the firelight shone on them as they strewed the floor like infernal gems. The red blood flowed redder as it streamed over her dress. Bosom and sleeves and skirt were dyed with her husband's life-blood; and the marred beauty of the man she loved was the last expression of her love.

With a kind of stupor for the present and a vivid return on the past, she remembered the stain on the yellow feathers of the bird, as she took up a fold of her gown and saw the red blood shot across the gold. She had killed her bird for jealousy, and now she had killed her husband; but it was in her right that both should belong to her, and her only; and had not the one deserted and the other betrayed her?

Ah! but that red spot staining the shining feathers of the golden bird, and that marred beauty of the man she loved—that lifeless body lying heavily across her lap!

The servant, who had heard the noise, came hur-

rying in, and her shrieks called in the neighbours. Soon the house was filled with the curious, whispering, horror-stricken crowd gathering round the doorway and looking at the awful scene, terrified and aghast. The murdered man across the lap of the kneeling woman—the lifeless head pressed against her bosom—the red blood over her dress and the firelight flashing over all:—it was a kind of infernal Pietà, where crime stood for sacrifice and the anguish of remorse for the agony of love.

Among the rest came Vincenzo, his black eyes glowing, his thick lips apart, his swarthy face transformed from its usual careless good-humour to the cruel triumph of a hunter who has at last come up with his prey.

“Can I help you, my life, my love?” he said in Sicilian, bending over Ione and touching her head with his hand.

She pushed back the hair from her forehead—there where he had touched her; and a red streak was left across the golden curls.

“No,” she said, with the quietness of despair; “I do not want you now. I have revenged myself.”

But now there came a dull kind of movement and a subdued murmur among the crowd, as the policeman, who had been summoned, elbowed his way through the throng and came up to the murdered man and his murderess. It was the end of all the passionate exaltation which had seemed to make this murder natural and right, and the beginning of the vulgar retribution which made it shameful and abominable. It was the end of romance and the beginning of reality—the hand of the law grasping the shoulder of the criminal who

had thought herself a victim rightly avenged by a heroine. This man, and the shuddering breath of the crowd, represented the degradation of her crime. How different from the admiring looks of the men when she had carried her dead bird in her hand at her father's mill!—or even from Vincenzo, now, when he bent over her and touched her head and called her his love and his life, while his hot breath on her forehead seemed like the kiss of some demon straight from the hell—where she was going. Going?—where she was at this moment!

But there was no help for it. She had committed a crime, and she must suffer for it; and the pitiless justice of the law knew no ruth because of her provocation, because of her passion, nor yet because of her beauty, her youth, nor her love.

Edward Formby was sitting in the library at Hill-side. He was dreaming of Ione and of to-morrow—of the terrible step he was about to take; of all it involved; of all to which it committed him both for loss and gain. Name, repute, social position, his own honour, his friends, the consciousness of evil example, the stain for ever on his conscience—these were for loss. For gain—he would have Ione. He loved her as he had never loved before and should never love again. And Armine was not worthy of her. Repute and honour would be lost, truly, but love and happiness would remain. She would forfeit what the world calls her claim to respect, but he would surround her with such careful devotion, such chivalrous regard, she should never feel that she had lost but only that she had gained. He would devote his whole life to her, and think the price paid for his treasure small in re-

lation to its worth. What so imperative as love? what so holy?

All the same—it had an ugly sound, that phrase which crystallized the coming fact:—Running away with another man's wife. Monica and Anthony, and dear mild gentle Mrs. Barrington—all like his own family for length of loving friendship—they would not speak to him. Mrs. Anthony would fling her poisoned assegais at him and her. The very tradespeople and peasants would despise him, the magistrate and dispenser of justice who had transgressed the law and lowered himself beyond their level. The county would reject him, and in the hunting-field he would be publicly shunned. And for all this he would care comparatively nothing if, when he came home, he found Ione at his fireside—when all the legal preliminaries should be completed—his own, his wife.

St. Claire had been his friend, yes; that was true. He had offered him his help in times past, because he pitied him as a robust well-found gentleman might justly pity a poor devil who had neither health nor money. But pity is not equality; and those whom we compassionate are never shoulder to shoulder with ourselves. Lately he had helped him because Ione suffered from the lack into which her husband had brought her. But a man who is helped by another man for the sake of his wife, stands on a still lower plane than when he was helped for himself alone. And in accepting that loan, Armine had yielded his position. Whether or not, the die was cast now, and Edward Formby had pledged himself, and could not draw back even if he would; and he would not if he could.

Thinking all this—feverish, restless, tormented, unsatisfied; his eyes following the light rings and wreaths of smoke as they eddied round his head for a few seconds, then dispersed for ever into space; his heart filled only with Ione, her beauty, his own imperious passion, the consciousness of infinite dishonour, and the feeling of the gambler prepared to stake his all on that one throw;—thinking all this and planning for to-morrow, the servant with a pale face and scared manner came hurriedly into the room. And behind him walked the country constable, almost as scared as he, leading by the arm Ione, red-handed; her dress dyed with blood; her dead-white face and red-gold hair both touched with blood; brought before him, the nearest magistrate—the man whose life-long Love she had agreed to be to-morrow—charged with the murder of her husband Armine.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INTO THE DEPTHS.

YEARS passed, and the awful crime of which Oakhurst had been the theatre had passed somewhat into the legendary stage. People of course still remembered Ione and all the facts of the case, and still discussed her and her poor husband with the acrimony of partisans. Some held her to have been a monster pure and simple, without excuse or extenuation to be found for her wickedness, search as you would; and others thought that, well, there had been some kind of provocation somewhere, and others were mixed up rather

more intimately than was desirable. Not much came out at the trial, but something did—enough to make people think there was more behind, and to obtain for Ione a comparatively lenient sentence.

A certain nameless cloud passed over Monica's repute, inasmuch as it came out that Ione had been jealous of her. No one said that this jealousy was well founded. No one even went so far as to say that Dr. St. Claire had dared to raise his eyes so high as Monica Barrington's fair face. Still less did any one suppose that she had stooped hers so low as to look at him. All the same—Ione had been jealous; and English society is intolerant of those unmarried interlopers who, however innocently, however unintentionally, poach on a wife's preserves. And though no one could say precisely What, every one hinted that Something had been; and though every one knew that Monica Barrington was an angel, still, on one of her shining wings was a certain slender but undoubted black feather.

Edward Formby, too, came in for his share of blame. Those dreams which had traversed his brain and fevered his blood as he watched the light rays of smoke eddy and then disperse were never made public to living soul; but his conduct had been imprudent enough to set suspicion afoot, and Vincenzo, who hated him, did him what damage he could. A few, however, defended him through all these possibilities of unproven iniquity. And of these Rachel Major was the staunchest. She loved him as women of lower condition, shut in by the narrow circumstances of a small country town, do sometimes love the unattainable great man of the place. It may be the squire or

the curate, the captain of the neighbouring regiment, or haply the heir of the ducal house. Whatever it is, it is the old story of the moth and the star; for the most part without even the chance of scorched wings. No one ever knows of this love, and few suspect it. It has no hope; no tangibility; no root-work in fact nor possibility; nevertheless it is—it exists. It colours all the thoughts and shapes all the dreams, and, even though it does not mould the actual circumstances of life, it destroys all solid happiness. And loving him as she did, secretly and without hope—loving him as Pygmalion loved Galatea, before Love made the marble human—or as maidens of old loved the god whom they desired as their own—Rachel defended Edward Formby with a faithfulness of advocacy which looked like neighbourly fidelity and Christian charity, and was in reality womanly love.

During the years of Ione's incarceration many changes took place at Oakhurst. Edward Formby was mostly away, travelling in remote places, and Hillside was practically untenanted. He had not married. A wife out in the wilds of Africa, or the untrodden forests of Madagascar, where he shot big game and ran hair-breadth risks of his life, would have been as much out of place as patent leather boots and my gentleman's gentleman to keep them bright. Nor was Monica married. And it seemed now as if neither of these two ever would find the fitting partner. They had been destined for each other by the fitness of things; and, flying in the face of Providence as they had done by frustrating its designs, they were rightly condemned to celibacy and joylessness, said those who thought any marriage better than none.

But Monica was not entirely unhappy for all the increased seclusion of her life, and the absence of outward gaiety. Two years after the murder she had brought home a little child—no one ever knew from where; and this seemed to have filled up the measure of her life and happiness. She had devoted herself to it as if she had been in very truth its mother, and people who had at first wondered had now left off speculating. But Anthony and Theodosia would never acknowledge this adoption, though they did not publicly oppose it. Still the world knew that they did not endorse it; and there were shrewd surmises why.

Vincenzo had disappeared. His shop had been put up for sale, and a respectable Englishman from the county town—the foreman of the large confectioner's there—had bought it as it stood, and re-transformed the whole thing to honest British uses. Those outlandish sweets disappeared, and good tough cakes and indigestible Bath-buns were to be found in their stead. Whereat all Oakhurst rejoiced, and gave itself periodical fits of patriotic dyspepsia in consequence.

Miss Maria Crosby was still the invalid par excellence of Oakhurst and Miss Jane Wintergreen, as formerly, the consecrated constable of private morals; while poor Rachel was her aunt's only half-devoted slave—the other half being that of a protesting victim. But then Rachel Major was one of those who are predestined to sacrifice by the very circumstances of condition and nature; predestined to give care and not to receive back acknowledgment; to squander a love unseen on a man who neither knew nor could have returned had he known. It is not only organisms

which prey on each other. Souls and affections follow the same law.

The time was now at hand when the term of Ione's imprisonment should be over. In a few days she would be free. Monica had kept the date ever before her eyes, for the great fear connected with it, as also for her determination still to befriend, if she could, the woman whom Armine St. Claire had married. She had always resolved that she would go and meet her at the prison-gates and be the first to receive her back to life and liberty, and, she hoped and believed, to repentance and the better way; and bring her home to the Dower House—and her child. Criminal as she was, whose hands had been dyed with her husband's blood, she was the mother of his child; she had been his wife; and she could not be discarded. The pity which Christ had shown to sinners might well be repeated by man for his brother; and Monica would be the friend of the passionate and miserable Ione—her friend to the last.

But the fates undid her web of plans and hopes. On the day when Ione was to be released Mrs. Barrington lay dying, and Monica's place was by her mother's death-bed, not before Ione's prison-gates. Still, even in the midst of all this anguish at the Dower House, she had remembered Armine's wife, and had written making arrangements for her safe convoy here.

As Ione came out into the open air she met Vincenzo standing to meet her. Faithful to the end he had come from Sicily to receive her. Where all the rest had deserted her, as it seemed, he stood firm in his love, without failure and without flaw. He was the

black thread in her life, woven into its very substance by the sin of her mother; the fate laid on her by the necessity of circumstances; her scourge and her punishment. But he loved her; he was faithful to her; where the whole world held aloof he came to receive her; and the crime which had dishonoured her with all others, had not discrowned her with him.

"Now you are mine," he said as he seized her by her hands, and drew her towards him, kissing her on her lips in the full light of day. "This is the day for which I have lived and waited, Ione! my love! my life! Now you belong to me, and I am your saviour! I, the poor Vincenzo, your father's servant, the only faithful love among all these great lords who pretended to adore you."

"No," said Ione; "I will not go with you. I will go to Monica Barrington. I want my child."

"You shall have your child," said Vincenzo. "We will go to the Dower House together. Come with me. We will go."

A carriage was standing there waiting on his orders. He spoke to the man in a low voice, then put Ione in, leaping in after her like a bloodhound when the quarry is at last run down. The man struck his horses, and they set off at a smart pace through the streets, down to the docks where a vessel lay ready to start for the Mediterranean, to the captain of which, his compatriot, Vincenzo had confided so much of the story as might be necessary to explain why this new passenger should be recalcitrant.

And when Monica's messenger returned to the Dower House, all that he could say was that the foreigner who had once owned Thornton's shop in

High Street had taken Mrs. St. Claire in his own carriage to bring her here to Oakhurst.

But they never came, and by no search were they able to be found.

Not to be found in good truth! Did any one ever look for them in that remote village on the sunny slopes of Etna, where Vincenzo brought to his lonely farm that beautiful half-foreign woman with her red-gold hair and strange wild eyes and wilder ways—like a bird ever beating her wings in vain, in vain, against an imprisonment worse and more hopeless than that English one had been? Entrapped; confined in space; the farm her doorless dungeon; the olive-gardens and the vineyards her roofless cells; unable to escape; mafiosi all around her—voluntary gaolers who brought her back when she tried to flee, and who would have stabbed her rather than she should ever be free; treated as mad when she made her moan and all chance of a hearing denied her; degraded by Vincenzo's love; revolted by his coarseness; insulted by his jealousy; maddened by his tyranny; she dragged out her weary life of expiation by suffering. No frantic prayer could make her husband give her news of her child.

"It is Monica Barrington's, it is not yours," he would say. "Be content with mine."

But his were not Armine's; and the bitterness of her motherhood was the worst of her many tortures. She had passed into the darkness of her fate—dark under the glowing sunlight, dreary for all the fragrance of the orange-blossoms, the crimson glory of the pomegranates, the splendour of the skies, the beauty of the seas. The sunlight gave her no joy, the moonlight no

peace. She was blotted out from the world, living and yet dead; a mother who could never see her child; a lover who had killed her beloved; the lady-wife of a man who had reduced her to the condition of a peasant, and who kept her as a slave whom he tortured even while he caressed; the reluctant mother of children abhorrent to her, because she abhorred him who gave them to her; a woman with the fatal gift of constancy, whose soul was never faithless to the past, and whose body was like a jewel pawned and pledged without her will—and impossible to redeem!

But she lived. She lived by the strength of the fierce desire and jealous hope that she might one day take Armine's child to her heart and detach her from Monica—that she might say: "I am your mother and you are my dead love's second life. Come to me, and leave her for whom he was slain. Love me who loved him and hate her who wronged me and caused his death." But that hope was false, that desire for ever unappeased. She lived on and on, in burning flames of jealousy and wrath and hate and yearning for revenge; and the day never came when she was free nor when she looked into the face of Armine's fair daughter, whom Monica Barrington had made her own.

THE END.

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THE END.

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